

METHODOLOGIES OF DISCERNING, TRUSTING AND FULLY
OBEYING THE VOICE OF GOD DURING
CHALLENGING SEASONS OF LIFE

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	viii
EPIGRAPH	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	7
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	25
Old Testament	
New Testament	
Conclusion	
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	52
Julian of Norwich: Autobiography	
Revelation of Divine Love: The Sixteen Shewings	
Conclusion	
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	71
Practical Theology: Christian Education	
Practical Theology: Christian Ethics	
Systematic Theology: Science and Religion	
Systematic Theology: Process Theology	

	Conclusion	
5.	INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS.....	90
	Social Work Discipline	
	Psychology Discipline	
	Psychiatry Discipline	
	Conclusion	
6.	PROJECT ANALYSIS.....	108
	Introduction	
	Methodology	
	Implementation	
	Summary of Learning	
	Conclusion	
APPENDIX		
A.	PRE- AND POST-TEST QUESTIONS	134
B.	SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DAILY JOURNALING	137
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	140

ABSTRACT

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The context is Monumental Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. A common problem in the life of many believers is not knowing if they are making the right decisions. The hypothesis is if methods about hearing God's voice were provided, the congregants would then likely trust God's guided voice. The spiritual baseline of forty congregants was measured by administering a pre and post-test. They were given scriptural and personal examples on increasing spiritual awareness of God's voice over a six-week period. The post-test indicated that most of the congregants gained some knowledge about understanding the voice of God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Doctor of Ministry Project was by far one of the greatest challenges that I have faced and conquered. When I started considering a focus for this project, I wanted to find something easy that would correlate with my numerous years of practicing in the field of mental health; however, The Holy Spirit urged me to challenge myself early on.

After spending some time in prayer and fasting, the Lord allowed me to reflect on my entire life and how I arrived in the space that I now occupy on this side of heaven. With the aforementioned reflecting, fasting and time spent in prayer, the voice of God encouraged me to focus on the importance of discerning, trusting and fully obeying His voice during the challenging seasons of life. With God's continuous faithfulness, desire to have me as His chosen vessel and for guiding me through this project, I want to say, thank you!

Although I was called by God before I became a mother, over the years, I have learned how to shift motherhood to the forefront of my life. To my beautiful, intelligent and favored daughter, Madelyn Grace (Maddy), I want to thank you for challenging me every day to be a woman of my word and a woman who co-depends on God to take care of us. I also want to thank you for being the reason why I fight and persevere through everything that comes my way. As your mother, protector and provider, I am privileged to have you in my life.

Taking care of my daughter is the most important role that I fulfill daily. United Theological is in Dayton, Ohio, I had to rely on a caregiver for my daughter while I attended every intensive. To my dedicated and dependable sister, Valerie Denise, words will never be able to describe how indebted I am to you. You took countless hours to feed, bathe, transport and help with Maddy's homework just as if she was your own child. Valerie, the seeds that you have sown have taken root on fertile ground and mature blessings shall find you during harvest time, thank you!

Lastly, to the Monumental Church family that so graciously allowed me to share my gifts of research and teaching during this doctoral process, I say thank you! Under the leadership of Pastor Wade Bryant, while at Monumental Baptist Church, the opportunities of exercising the gifts that God has bestowed upon me have been plentiful. As I continue to share in the ministry of kingdom building with you all, I pray that my service becomes more of a direct reflection of the gratitude that is in my heart for each of you.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1	Demographic survey results – gender.....	129
2	Demographic survey results – age range	129
3	Demographic survey results – education level	130
4	Demographic survey results – number of years attending church.....	130
5	Demographic survey results – Bible study attendance	131
6	Demographic survey results – income range	131

Tables

1	Demographic survey	118
2	Pre-test results	128
3	Post-test results	128

You will never be able to trust and obey a voice that you cannot discern. A still body and a quiet mind can be the hearing-aids that help you recognize the voice above all voices, that is, the voice of God.

—Cassandra D. Clariett

INTRODUCTION

Being able to discern, trust, and fully obey the voice of God will lead to a life full of faith and favor for born-again believers. A common problem that I have analyzed in my personal life and the life of other believers is not knowing if they are or are not making the right decisions. Based on my personal experiences, I have developed a pattern of being faced with a problem, praying about the problem, and then guessing about which direction I should take.

God is the Creator of all things and He sees and knows all, Christians should ask God, what is the right decision? After asking Christians should obey what he says. In delving deeper into the answer to this question, I took into account why I have struggled with the above-mentioned tasks. For years, I have struggled with knowing when God is speaking, the devil is speaking, or when I am speaking to myself. After going through several encounters that pushed me to fast, pray, and be still, I learned the voice patterns of God.

This discovery is not to say that I will never get ahead of God by listening to my own voice; however, I can say that I have learned that God's voice is like a whisper that only suggests and not demands. The question that I am hypothesizing is, can Christians live error free lives if they learn how to discern, trust, and obey the voice of God? I am proposing that Christians can live lives that are error free if they learn how to follow the

three-fold method of knowing when God is speaking (discern), having the faith that God will not fail them (trust) and wanting more of Him over selfish desires (obey).

During this project process, I wanted to provide methodologies for learning, trusting, and obeying the voice of God through six weeks of one-hour teachings. These one-hour teachings consisted of biblical, scholarly, researched, and personal experiences. At the beginning of this six-week process, the specific content areas that would be covered and the reasoning behind each were presented as:

Chapter two of the research focused on the biblical perspective. In exploring the importance of discerning, trusting, and fully obeying the voice of God from a biblical perspective, the lives of King Saul and the Apostle Paul were surveyed. Both were chosen vessels assigned to carry out the will of God. In addition, both showed the ability to discern and trust the voice of God; however, King Saul did not obey the voice of God. The biblical encounters found in 1 Samuel 15:13-16, 22-25 and Acts 9:4-15 serve as evidence that God has specifically created humanity for His purpose, but we must be willing to grow closer to him each day. Our God ordained purposes can be revealed during the quiet intimate moments that we spend with Him.

As stated previously, God will ask us to do things that do not make sense; however, God expects us to hearken to God's voice and carry out what God has asked. Next, when God speaks, God will also inform someone within our reach about His plans; therefore, we will be able to hear confirmation from someone other than God. Thirdly, God will elevate or give things that we are not ready for so we can learn about our strengths and weaknesses. In addition, God allows us to be in positions and situations that will cause us to spend more time talking to Him in prayer. Lastly, God will extend His

grace and mercy; however, He will not allow us to remain in leadership roles for His people when our hearts are full of selfishness.

Chapter three was written from a historical perspective that examined the life and revelations of Julian of Norwich. Looking at the life and spiritual encounters of a woman who was bold enough to write about what God shared with her while on her sick bed can be encouraging to anyone who feels ignorant about the voice of God. In addition, Julian's encounter is an example of how God is willing to go to great lengths to show us who He really is and what he has for us to do. Julian did not allow her gender as woman stop her from telling of God's sanctioned and sacred moments during the fourteenth century. Although it took her twenty years to inform the world of her unique encounter with God, Julian was careful to include every aspect of God, how God spoke to her, and the importance of the Trinity when referencing the voice of God.

Julian's revelations about the sufferings of Christ, herself, and the voice of God, clearly demonstrated that spiritual encounters with the God of our faith. Everyone will not experience God in the same manner; however, we should have a divine encounter that leaves us saying without a doubt that the God of our faith is real. The experience that we have should become our personal testimonies that we often reflect so that we are reminded of what God has individually shown us. In addition, we should recall our divine experiences when we are unsure of a strange process that God is asking us to fully trust and obey.

When considering the voice of God from a theological perspective (chapter four), I was inclined to take an in depth look at Christian education and ethics from the practical theological lens and Science and Religion and Process Theology from the systematic

approach. Every believer must be ethical and intentional about gaining formal and informal educational opportunities about the voice of God. Although churches should almost be required to have Christian education opportunities, believers must be intentional and have a high standard of integrity about cultivating their relationship with God. A deepen relationship with God requires learning how to discern his voice from yours and the devil. Mistakes will be made in the life of every believer; however, bad habits can be avoided with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Wayne A. Grudem's book, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, references systematic theology as being any study that provides an answer on what the whole Bible teaches us today on any given topic.¹ Systematic theology is situated within the theoretical area of theology and is one of the three disciplines in this area, biblical and historical are the other two. Systematic theology is very broad in the sense that it allows for more detailed thought processes during the discussions around specific Christian doctrines.

Next, modern day believers should have a certain degree of understanding how science plays a part human anatomy. The Bible is true in identifying God as the Creator of all things; however, it does not speak to how mankind ought to medically care for the body. With information such as medical guidelines missing from the Bible, Christians should be receptive to the many people that God has gifted with knowledge about the human body. In addition, according to Jerry Coyne, science is a set of tools refined over hundreds of years for getting answers about nature and can be considered a method for understanding how the universe works. Science is an evolving field that does not

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 1.

permit stagnation or contentment; therefore, it demands research and further consideration of things that have already been established.² Religion should also be as such.

Lastly, sound Christian theology should consider the true identity of Process Theology. Although Process Theology can be confusing and not well received, Christians should take time to examine its offerings. Process Theology pushes and stretches believers to know God as one who is relational and not just authoritative. Since God is relational, believers are given the chance to choose or reject everything that He has to offer, including His voice as guidance.

Chapter five focused on the interdisciplinary aspects of the research. The field of mental health in conjunction with the professions of counseling and social work are all instrumental in the lives of Christians who desire to spiritually grow into discerning the voice of God. In modern-day society, we see more and more people who are suffering from mental illnesses that are either untreated or undiagnosed. In addition, because people are not clinically equipped to deal with the issue of the mind, they are more likely to turn to unhealthy use of chemicals and substances. Just as born-again believers are ethically responsible for caring for the spiritual growth, they are equally responsible for their mental health.

Julian of Norwich's mental capacity can be given further thought as she found herself in the bed sick for a period of time. Depression can be considered here, and schizophrenia could be talked about; however, Julian was still able to attribute her revelations to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Although some Christians struggle with

² Jerry A. Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 28.

accepting mental health related diagnoses, the sad reality is, they are real; and many believers are suffering with them.

Within the African American community, the idea of counseling is shunned and frowned upon. The African American community has a history of having strong religious beliefs and convictions; however, it is this community that suffers in silence and is less likely to receive counseling to address certain mental health issues. Embracing the idea of science is also a challenge for the African American community of faith. When we analyze the field of counseling and its correlation to one being able to discern the voice of God, counselors are noted for the influence and guidance that they offer to patients. Just as social workers seek to empower people by allowing them to choose decisions that they feel are best for their lives, counselors also take the same approach when advising.

Lastly, when people begin to deal with psychosis and other mental illness such as chronic delusions, they tend to hear voices and may become obsessed with religious ideas. Unhealthy or irrational delusions can cause one to question the validity of the voice of God. As previously mentioned, Christian believers have an ethical obligation to educate themselves on how God speaks and moves.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

It has been said that every child desire and needs a family that gives them attention, love, and aids in meeting their basic needs. As with other children, the above-mentioned desires were also a part of my childhood desires. As a licensed clinician, an emphasis has always been placed on a client's childhood in order to gain a full understanding of any past or present issues. With information gathered about one's childhood, it is easier to grasp why the individual is very passionate, or in some cases, lack passion for life. According to Jeremiah 1:5 "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Before God formed us in our mother's womb, God took the time to learn about us, write our life plans, and ordained each of us for our earthly assignment. Secondly, because God has written and planned our designated purpose in life, He allows for certain things to happen, both good and bad, in order to shape us into people who will be able to fulfill every task assigned to our lives. When we perfectly weave our physical and spiritual life experiences together, we will have a developed spiritual autobiography that helps others to understand how God has been a part of every aspect of our life.

As noted by Richard Peace, “a spiritual autobiography is the story of God’s interaction in our lives. It Chronicles our pilgrimage as we seek to follow God.”¹ In this chapter, I will present how God has allowed my various experiences to help shape, make, and mold me into the woman I am today. As we all learn how to embrace our testimonies and trials, we will begin to see the hand of God bringing forth the plans that he wrote out for us. As God’s creations, if we had our choices about how we went through life, no one would willingly choose a life of trauma, hurts, and pains just to blossom into beautiful living testaments of God’s grace and love. As stated by Dictionary.com, the word *synergy* is “the interaction of elements that when combined produce a total effect that is greater than the sum of the individual elements, and contributions.”²

As I prepared myself for this dissertation journey, I was led to reflect on how my spiritual journey has connected perfectly to my current place in ministry. This new place of ministry has encouraged change and a spiritual revival in my personal life. Richard Peace states, “First, in telling of our story, we come to accept who we are in new ways. Second, in the hearing of others’ stories, we come to understand our own stories better. And finally, in the telling and the hearing, we are bound together in new and deep ways.”³

In January of 2015, God allowed me to join with Monumental Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Since then, I have focused my attention on my role as a minister; however, I have loaned my gifts in other capacities such as teaching Sunday School,

¹ Richard Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998), 57.

² “Synergy,” Dictionary.com, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/synergy>.

³ Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 25.

working with the youth department, creating graphic designs, and so forth. Before joining with Monumental, I specifically prayed and asked God to provide an avenue for all my gifts to be used, and the opportunities have been plentiful.

To begin, a strong sense of commitment and faithfulness has always been a part of my character. Although I was not living for God during my teen years, I believed in and respected God from a distance. My faithfulness and commitment were to the streets and the people who were around me during that time. Upon my true conversion and acceptance of Christ into my life, I immediately became faithful to Him and the kingdom. My life has not been perfect; however, my attendance to corporate and private worship has remained wholeheartedly unwavering.

Faithfulness of congregants is something that is lacking in most congregations today. I also firmly believe that a believer's time spent in private worship will reflect in corporate worship based on their attendance and willingness to lend their gifts. In his book *New Wine, New Wineskin*, F. Douglas Powe, Jr. poses a profound question and statement, that is, "Do you recognize this congregation? It was strong and vibrant forty or fifty years ago but is now struggling to maintain itself."⁴ This question and statement is applicable to so many congregations today. My passion for faithfulness to God serves as an example for other young adults who may not see a need for committed attendance to corporate worship.

Next, God has given me the unique ability of being able to interact and relate to people of all ages. Shortly after starting my seminary journey, God spoke to me about how He wanted to use me concerning His kingdom, that is, pastoring a flock of His sheep

⁴ F. Douglas Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations can Reach New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 86.

one day. With an open appreciation for people of all ages, I can use a creative mindset for corporate worship and ministry that is inclusive of everyone. The African American church as we see it today looks vastly different than the church during the Civil Rights Era. The Civil Rights Era church was filled on Sunday mornings and it “ignited a flame in those outside of the community to participate in constructing a new society.”⁵

Civil Rights Era church goers, as found within the Progressive Baptist sect, are now fighting to remain relevant during a time when Millennials are looking for a mind-blowing Jesus experience during a corporate worship experience. “We should not come to worship and leave week after week never feeling challenged to live out God’s word in new ways. Worship is not a social meeting...this is what made worship during the Civil Rights and Black Consciousness generations so powerful.”⁶

Thirdly, God has allowed me to be one that embraces change for the edifying of the kingdom. As we all know, our world has moved towards fully embracing technology; however, some Christian believers are still reserved about the use of technology concerning kingdom building. Leonard Sweets states, “change is God’s signature on life. The Creator creates, and humans are made in the Creator’s image. That means we are also created to create. Creation is another word for change, and to be creative is to be adept at change.”⁷ The Christian church should take a universal approach concerning the implementation, use, and advancement of technology to glorify God.

⁵ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 40.

⁶ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 100.

⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2012), 33.

When we look at social media and how it has impacted our society, as born-again believers, we have the same ability to use it to evangelize to unbelievers. At the age of eighteen years old, I pursued my first degree in Business Information Systems. While obtaining this degree, I developed a passion for technology that allowed me to learn how to build websites, complete graphic designs, and basic accounting practices. It is my belief that God has interwoven every aspect of our lives, so He can use us to impact the kingdom and bless the lives of all that connect with our gifts.

Context

Since the passing of the first pastor of Monumental Baptist Church, Reverend Samuel Billy Kyles, Pastor Wade C. Bryant has been tirelessly working to move the congregation in a direction of evangelism that would welcome those in the community to the body of Christ. For the most part, Monumental has always been a family-oriented church where everyone is related in some way; therefore, new members are not always made to feel openly welcome. As stated by Douglas Powe, Jr., “becoming a missional congregation means making space in worship for all to feel comfortable and challenged to live out the gospel.”⁸

On the other hand, Monumental’s family-oriented culture has proven to be a strength whenever there has been a crisis in the community or church. Monumental has adopted a local school and various members go at least two times per week to provide tutoring services and read to kindergarteners. Monumental has also helped those in the community by doing coat, clothing, and food drives that provide temporary support.

⁸ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 101.

Secondly, Monumental's congregants are mostly over the age of forty; therefore, most have strong family systems and faithfully attend services. One of the flaws of having a congregation mostly over the age of forty is, the number of congregants that are available to put physical time into evangelism and weekly Bible study. After restructuring how Bible study was being held and moving into the area of a mid-week service, the Bible study attendance increased but only for a couple of months. In addition, with Monumental's strong foundation rooted in the Civil Rights Movement, minimal emphasis was placed on congregants learning about the Holy Trinity and the Word of God. With a focus on being missional, Monumental can begin building a bridge that will produce visible change inside the four walls and outside the community.⁹

Thirdly, Monumental is missing the Millennial and Generation X populations. "Creating a worship experience that bridges the gap between generations takes a lot of work."¹⁰ Without the eagerness and energy of those eighteen to thirty-nine years old, Monumental's worship services, Sunday School, and mid-week Bible study have not shown a consistent presence of congregants in attendance. Some older congregants report that they do not feel safe driving in such a dangerous neighborhood at night and others have full-time careers with demanding family needs. Since Monumental has a population of mostly forty-year-old congregants, its financial stability is strong.

Fourthly, most of the congregants of Monumental have attended there since birth or its initial start. The congregants of Monumental have and still struggle with embracing another leader since the health decline and death of the only pastor since its existence.

⁹ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 96.

¹⁰ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 101.

Although our nation struggles with social inequality and justice for African Americans, as born-again believers who set aside a specific day for worship, when we come together, we should worship God by being receptive of the leadership that God has made possible. Monumental was heavily involved during the Civil Rights Era, I feel that it should still have a voice in that area; however, the primary focus should be wherever God wants to lead it. Monumental has some involvement in the local People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) operation; therefore, that avenue could be pursued to bring an emphasis on continued Civil Rights efforts.

Next, Monumental currently has various active ministries (men, women, youth, deacons, senior shepherd, music, Christian education, and usher's) that are used every Sunday; however, Monumental does not have a ministry in place that will allow for younger children to learn about Christ in a way that will prepare them for salvation. Due to the crime rate and numerous broken homes in the same zip code as Monumental, a mental health or social services ministry could also be beneficial to the community.

Monumental Baptist Church has proven in the past how it can be a thriving beacon of hope for such a poverty stricken and crime ridden community. For the most part, the congregants of Monumental have not had proper time to grieve the loss of the only pastor most of them have ever known; therefore, some of the congregants have been fighting and refusing to embrace the new leadership that God has allowed. Monumental appears to have limited information about the Holy Spirit and how it operates to carry out the will of God; therefore, profound biblical education about how God uses leaders to move His people from season-to-season and generation-to-generation could be beneficial.

Fifthly, Monumental is placed in a high traffic area where babies are being born often; however, the parents and the babies are not being reached. In addition, for those who have been reached, they do not remain due to lack of outreach in a mental, emotional, and spiritual manner. With an understanding of its purpose to the community, the Monumental Church family can learn how to be all things for all people. With them no longer marching, protesting or holding press conferences to address social issues, what is Monumental assigned to do in this season and the seasons to come? With an outward focus more so than an inward one, Monumental as a whole can move from an “attitude of protectionism.”¹¹

Lastly, with a thorough observation of the Monumental Baptist Church family, it is determined that they would benefit from learning how to discern, trust, and obey the voice of God. Death or transition of a leader is never an easy task; however, it is needed for the people of God to fulfill their purpose and destiny. Through fasting and praying as a unified body of believers, scripture-based teachings about the movement of the Holy Spirit, and receptive hearts, the congregants of Monumental can learn how hearing the voice of God as they embrace a new season can heal the brokenness that is present.

Ministry Journey

As I reflect to the age of three, I can remember the small bus coming to pick me up for head start very early in the morning hours. I was fascinated with learning and enjoyed watching Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow after getting home. With my family relocating to Memphis when I was five years old, my mother took me to the

¹¹ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 92.

nearest elementary school and enrolled me. From the very beginning, I was excelling because I was able to get a head start on learning and I simply loved learning. For the first four years of elementary school, I attended the same school; however, when my parents separated, and my mother obtained new housing, I was enrolled in another school during my fourth-grade year.

When my fifth-grade year began, for the first time, the teacher called my mother due to me using profanity and being disrespectful to the teacher. This phone call was the first of many. In addition to the phone calls, I also received my first suspension for fighting. My behavior at school was out of control and my mother was getting very tired of taking time off from work to enroll me back in school. When I was promoted to the sixth-grade, I was placed in the classroom of a male teacher and this was a big mistake. From the first day of sixth-grade, I absolutely hated my teacher and at that time, I did not understand why. I formed an attitude of rebellion and disrespect; therefore, I was kicked out of his class just about every day. When the assistant principal noticed that I was simply not a good fit for the male teacher, I was moved back to my fifth-grade teacher's classroom and there, I completed my sixth-grade year. It was now time for me to start the journey of going through junior high school; however, after only three weeks of being in the seventh-grade, I was expelled for the remainder of the school year because I cursed out the teacher and pushed her head.

My seventh-grade school year was put on hold and I found myself at home with no supervision during the day. I know had more time to get high and hang out in the neighborhood. A new school year rolled around, and I was enrolled in the seventh grade again and this time, I was in school for about four months before I was expelled for

smoking marijuana in the hallway. This time the principle agreed to let me return but, only after I completed alcohol and drug and I refused to go. Again, I found myself out of school another school year; therefore, I was retained in the seventh-grade. My mother again enrolled me at the start of another school year but this time, I simply skipped school every day and avoided expulsion. In addition, I was put up to the eight-grade.

A couple of months into the new school year, I was arrested and withdrawn from my third junior high school. I went on to attend school while locked up in Saint Peter's Home for Girls and I excelled in every subject. After being released from Saint Peter's Home for Girls at the age of seventeen, I returned to the public-school system and was only in the eighth grade due to constantly skipping school and being expelled.

At the rate I was going, I would not graduate from high school until the age of twenty-two; therefore, I started meeting with the school counselor to find out what my options were. The school counselor recommended that I pursue a General Educational Development (GED) because it would give me access to college and I would be able to complete it before the age of eighteen. After obtaining my GED, my mother talked with me about going to college to have a chance at getting a better job that would allow for me to earn more than minimum wage.

During that time, my mind was set on moving out of my mother's home into my own apartment, getting a job, and living a quiet life; however, I gave my mother's advice thought as well. One month after my mother spoke with me about college, I told her that I was enrolling into an eighteen-month program that would allow for me to earn an Associates degree in Business Information Systems.

When my enrollment process was completed, I informed my mother that I was moving out and getting my own apartment; therefore, she had the option of coming to live with me due to all three of my brothers being in the home and not working. My mother gladly accepted the invitation and moved in with me. In addition to going to school, I purchased my first car and started working in a distribution warehouse overnight.

Although I was excelling in school, I was seriously starting to ponder about what I really wanted to do with my life because I somehow wanted to help other children who experienced what I did while growing up. Within eighteen-months, I completed my first Associates of Applied Science degree in Business Information Systems; however, I was clueless about where I could gain employment with the degree. Later in the year, my church completed the building of a new family life center and a secretary position became open and I was selected for the job working twenty-six hours per week. I often talked with my pastor and he encouraged me to further my education by going back to school while I was working part-time hours and I did. I soon after enrolled in Northwest Community and started what was called the two plus two-track.

The two plus two-track allowed me to start working on all freshman courses that would be transferred over to the University of Mississippi in order for me to obtain a Bachelors degree. After completing my freshman and sophomore years and Northwest Community College, I obtained my second Associates degree; however, this degree was in Liberal Arts. During the same year, in the month of August 2009, I begin working on a Bachelor of Social Work degree.

At this point in my life, everything was starting to make sense and the Holy Spirit was guiding me into my calling as a Social Worker. When I began to do more research on the field of Social Work, I realized that I would be able to assist any at risk population during my career. In spring of 2009, I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work. As I started working, I became more interested in furthering my education in the field of Social Work; therefore, in the summer of 2010, I started graduate school online with the University of Tennessee-Knoxville School of Social Work.

I completed my Bachelors degree with a grade point average of 3.8, and was able to start graduate school at the advanced standing level; therefore, I was able to complete my Masters of Science degree in Social Work in eighteen-months. After completing this degree, one year later, I sat for the National Exam and passed. Although the thought of pursuing my Doctor of Social Work came up a time or two, I decided to dedicate my fifth and final degree to advancing for the Kingdom of God.

While coming up to my tenth year as a proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I enrolled in the Pre-Doctoral program at United Theological Seminary. Since I parent my six-year old daughter by myself, have a full-time career, and involved with ministry full time, I decided to pursue my Doctor of Ministry. With much prayer and supplication, I will complete my Doctor of Ministry degree with United Theological Seminary Spring of 2020.

After accepting my call into the ministry in 2005, I participated in Dr. Fred C. Lofton's School of Ministry every Saturday for eighteen months. It was during that time that I gained a thorough understanding of what it meant to be an associate minister. Also, being able to teach Sunday School on a weekly basis encouraged and

required me to study God's Word. In addition, I was assigned the tasks of being a Youth Leader, Work Study Supervisor, and Church Secretary.

Fulfilling each of these duties prepared me to enter Corporate America. I obtained my first full time job as a Social Worker in 2009 at Youth Villages Residential Treatment Facility and my actual job title was Youth Counselor. While employed within the Residential Campus, I was afforded the opportunity to learn more about adolescents that suffered from emotional disturbances and coming from broken homes.

After working directly with adolescents in the residential programs for ten months, I was promoted to the position of Foster Care Counselor. I fulfilled my role as a Foster Care Counselor for eight months before I got pregnant and then I applied to become a Foster Care Trainer for potential foster parents across the state of Tennessee. This position allowed for me to have set hours, less stress, more time to complete my Masters degree, and the ability to focus on the child that I was carrying.

After completing my Masters degree and having my daughter, I returned to the clinical side of Youth Villages and became a Clinical Supervisor. In this new role, I supervised a team of Foster Care Counselors and ensured that they were properly trained and equipped to provide therapy to children within the foster care system. For six years, I was employed with Youth Villages; however, in 2014, I became a Medical Social Worker with Methodist Healthcare. Although I have held down full-time jobs as a Social Worker, I have always kept my hands busy in ministry. Since transitioning in 2015 to a new church home, I have been busy developing a Greif and Loss Ministry, putting together Resume Building and Job Fairs for the community, and much more.

Synergy

Have you ever wondered who came up with idea of creating a beautiful picture, cutting it up, and calling it a puzzle? In 1776, John Spilsbury introduced the first jigsaw puzzle to the world by painting a picture and using a jigsaw to cut it up.¹² When a puzzle is not put together, it can be hard for one to visualize the beauty that is before them; however, when one glances back at the box to see what the finished work should look like, they can find the motivation to sort through the pieces. After visualizing and sorting through, one can begin to make the pieces of the puzzle fit together to have in front of them what was seen on the box. Just as John Spilsbury saw a vision of creating beautiful pictures only to break them apart, God's vision for our lives is similar.

When I think about my personal puzzle (life), I can see where and when God allowed Satan to start attempting to break my life. This breaking came in the form of being exposed to domestic violence, a single parent home with little to no supervision, drug use, physical aggression, and incarceration. Since God is the giver and the creator of life, He is the one who can visualize and sort through it to put us back together after the face of the devil has surfaced in life.

In January of 2015, God added another piece to my puzzle (life) in the form of a new place of worship. This new piece of my puzzle has caused me to question God for answers about my move to Monumental Baptist Church; however, this curiosity has also caused me to increase my faith, trust, and ability to listen to the voice of God. In being able to listen to the voice of God, I have learned that one must sit through periods of silence and being still. Our spiritual ears are not used the same way our physical ears are

¹² "People and Portrait," National Portrait Gallery, 2017, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp62395/john-spilsbury>.

used; therefore, we must train our spiritual ears to be functional as all five senses through praying, meditating, fasting, and waiting on direction from God. Although a developed spiritual ear will require a lifetime of praying, meditating, fasting, and waiting on direction from God, I have personally learned what happens when one trusts and obeys the voice of God and when one doubts and disobeys His voice.

To begin, as a licensed minister, I got pregnant out of wedlock in 2010 and I contemplated several times aborting the child because I was clueless about how a child would fit into my life at that moment. I found myself sad most days and crying most nights because I was worried about what people would think versus what God was saying to me, that is, “I am the Creator of life.” It was not until I got to a place of fully trusting and obeying the voice of God that I found myself not giving thoughts to what others may have to say about my fall from grace.

When I think about my contextual focus, they too may have contemplated leaving (aborting) the church altogether because of being clueless about the direction the new leader may take them. Congregants may have already encountered loud whispers of “you should leave because it will never be the same” or “if I were you, I would stay right there and not do anything that new pastor says.” It is during turbulent, sad, or disappointing times when Satan attempts to speak to us most; therefore, it is important for all believers to learn the voice of God.

The previous statement of “it is important for all believers to learn the voice of God” is the driving factor for my proposed dissertation study for the selected context, which is, “Hearing the Voice of God as You Embrace a New Season.” As a matured Christian, I have learned that God’s voice attempts to guide us from heartbreak, hurt, and

being used by Satan; therefore, if we learn to hear His voice, we will grow to the point of trusting and embracing all that God desires for our lives. Since I rededicated my life to Christ at the age of nineteen, I have heard numerous theologians press upon believers to know which voice is speaking to them; therefore,

God's voice must be differentiated from that of the enemy (Satan), from evil spirits or internal voices deriving from internal bodily signals such as hunger and thirst. All hold that hearing God's voice is normative for Christians; however, they emphasize that God only communicates in ways that are congruent with biblical teachings. Any communication which contradicted these cannot come from Him.¹³

In his article "The Voice of God," Dr. Simon Dein states,

God is present everywhere. But the Holy Spirit of God also dwells in the spirit of a believer at the time of conversion. After this experience, the Spirit of God communes with the believer and provides fellowship (comfort and peace) and direction. The extent to which a person discerns the voice of God depends on her maturity, obedience and consecration as well as the desire for closeness with God. "The human person consists of body, soul and spirit (at the core). God's voice is spoken to the believer in his/her 'spirit-man' and recognized as a 'still, small, voice.' Sometimes a believer hears an audible voice, but this is a rare experience and not the norm. The object of the Holy Spirit's indwelling is to make us conform to the image of Christ."¹⁴

Hearing the voice of God invokes conformity and a warm embrace for His many changes and seasons that will come in life. It is with this thought for Monumental Baptist Church that I will seek to prove that learning how to properly discern and trust the voice of God, as a congregation, they will flow into an effective season of embracing new leadership and putting feet to the God-given vision.

Next through this dissertation process, I will provide methodologies for learning, trusting, and obeying the voice of God through six to eight weeks of one-hour teachings.

¹³ Simon Dein and Roland Littlewood, "The Voice of God," *Anthropology and Medicine* 14, no. 2 (2007).

¹⁴ Dein and Littlewood, "The Voice of God."

These one-hour teachings will consist of biblical, scholarly, researched, and personal experiences. At the beginning of this six to eight-week process, a pre-test will be provided to assess where the participants are spiritually with their understanding of the voice of God. During a mid-way point, another evaluation will be given to determine if more sessions are needed or if I can end the sessions.

The specific content areas that will be covered during the six to eight sessions will include but not limited to:

1. Discerning God's Voice
2. Trusting God's Voice
3. Obeying vs. Disobeying God's Voice (Biblical and Personal Encounters)
4. When We Can't Hear His Voice
5. The Various Ways God Speaks
6. Training Our Spiritual Ears
7. The Power of Fasting and Praying
8. Intimacy with God Through Worship

Through these explored topics concerning the voice of God, it is my hope that this dissertation journey leads me to a more developed and closer relationship with God in every way possible. To begin, I want to develop a new attitude of not second guessing why God wants me to do something. Secondly, I want to develop a lifestyle of fasting at least one day out of the week. Thirdly, I want to become disciplined about remaining still with a patient spirit until God speaks. Lastly, it is my prayer that I become sensitive to the Holy Spirit in a manner that will allow me to hear what God has to say concerning those whom I minister to.

With my various skills and gifts (discernment, teaching, preaching, leading, organizing, seasonal mental health professional, media, marketing, and social work), it is my intent to be used by God to help stir-up the gifts and hearts of the congregants of Monumental Baptist Church during this dissertation process. As stated by Carol M. Roberts, “completing the dissertation journey is an adventure in learning and personal growth, the outcome of which can result in extraordinary accomplishment and contribution.”¹⁵ May God be glorified before, during, and after my work on this project is completed.

¹⁵ Carol M. Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2010), 2.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Bible is arguably one of the greatest books ever written. The Bible is made of written records of God's love, guidance, and compassion that took place at the beginning of time. These written records were provided by the various human vessels that God choose to speak to either directly or through other forms. How can one be so sure that the Holy scriptures are accurate and trustworthy? How can mankind fully trust that it was in fact God speaking to the judges, prophets, kings, disciples, and apostles? For one to become a born-again believer (Christian), they must exercise faith and trust in the Word of God.

When an unbeliever surrenders their life to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, a verbal agreement of belief in the Trinity is established. With this new covenant in place, it is impressed upon the new believer to use the Holy scriptures to hear and learn about God's will concerning them.

The biblical narrative depicts God blessing His creations, the creations disobeying Him, Him bringing forth chastisement, His creations repenting, and then the loving God embracing and fully restoring them; therefore, the Christian believer has a full glimpse of what is in store when they assume a covenant relationship with God. When one places

their trust in those outside of their ecological system, they must consider the risks of hurt, failure, and the unknown.¹

According to Walter Elwell, the biblical meaning of the word “covenant” can be understood as, “two or more parties bound together” and it has a “Latin origin (convenire), meaning a coming together. It presupposes two or more parties who come together to make a contract, agreeing on promises, stipulations, privileges, and responsibilities. In religious and theological circles there has not been an agreement on precisely what is to be understood by the biblical term. It is used variously in biblical contexts.”²

How often should a believer read the Word of God to grow and be able to discern His voice? Although there is no specific requirement for reading the Word of God, a believer’s spiritual growth, communication with God, and understanding of the scriptures will impact the fully manifested presence of God in their life.³

In many instances in the Bible, we can see where God’s presence was fully manifested in the lives of the vessels He chose to use. For example, Jesus Christ was able to fulfill His purpose of bringing salvation to a dying world by discerning, trusting, and obeying the voice of God. Next, Job was a righteous man who spent a significant amount of time dialoguing with God about his life and Job’s faithfulness to God’s voice allowed

¹ Lynn M. Hempel, Todd Matthews, and John Bartkowski, “Trust in a ‘Fallen World’: The Case of Protestant Theological Conservatism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 3 (September 2012): 522, accessed February 15, 2018, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

² Walter Elwell, “Covenant,” Bible Study Tools, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/covenant/>.

³ Pamela Caudill Ovwigbo and Arnold Cole, “Scriptural Engagement, Communication with God, and Moral Behavior Among Children,” *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 15, no. 2 (May 2010): 101, accessed February 15, 2018, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

him to have full restoration of the things he lost (Job 42:10-17). Lastly, the Apostle Paul willingly gave an ear to the Lord's voice while traveling down a Damascus road and because of his listening ear and obedience, he went on to write over half of the New Testament as we see it today.

Although the Paul and Job discerned, trusted, and obeyed the voice of God and found favor, there are some in the Bible who fell from grace due to disobedience. To begin, Moses was a great leader that was chosen by God to lead the Children of Israel to the promised land; however, he did not carry out the task due to hitting a rock that he was instructed to speak to (Ex. 17:1-7).

Secondly, King David was a man after God's own heart and was very instrumental in writing most of the Book of Psalm. David desired to build a temple for the Ark of the Covenant; however, God did not allow him to carry out this task due to the blood shed from war and killing Uriah (1 Chron. 28:3). Lastly, God spoke through two angels to Lot (Abraham's nephew) and instructed him to flee from Sodom with his family because the city was going to be destroyed. Lot and his family were also instructed not to look back at the city of Sodom; however, his wife, who is unnamed, looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26).

The before mentioned biblical characters are good examples of how God's favor combined with obedience to His voice will bring forth purpose and how disobedience can prevent one from fully reaching their purpose. This section will provide a comparative narration between the life of King Saul from the Old Testament and the Apostle Paul of the New Testament. The comparative analysis will depict they both discerned and trusted

the voice of the Lord: however, King Saul failed to obey whereas the Apostle Paul fully complied and found favor with the Lord.

Old Testament

The Reign and Fall of King Saul

1 Samuel 15:13-16, 22-25 states:

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?” Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.” “Enough!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

But Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD?

To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.” Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.”⁴

Survey of Text

First Samuel 15:13-16, 22-25 presents dialogue between Samuel and King Saul after his return from war against the Amalekites. Although the plot of this text largely focuses on dialogue between Samuel and King Saul, the themes of repentance and God favoring obedience over sacrifice are also key elements within the text.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NIV.

During the initial meeting, King Saul spoke the blessing of the Lord upon Samuel and spoke of how he carried out the instructions given. However, due to a previous conversation with God, Samuel knew that King Saul's disobedience was before him. King Saul used certain speech within the text in verse fifteen to shift the disobedience from him onto the soldiers; however, the commandments were given to King Saul, and the soldiers were to follow his instructions, that is, to destroy everything connected to the Amalekites from the king on down to the youngest child.

Moreover, Samuel told King Saul that he had heard enough of the excuses that were being presented as justification for his actions and informed him that God was rejecting him as king due to his disobedience. After hearing what his punishment would be, King Saul again attempted to explain why he allowed the soldiers to bring back the spoil of the Amalekites and requested that Samuel return to worship with him.

Being a leader or in this case a king, one is held to higher standards and harsher consequences due to disobedience. Disobedience should not be minimized by a leader or follower when one has been called by God because it will only lead to death, destruction, or a disaster. God is aware of every flaw that we may have and sometimes, we have yet to know that we hold certain flawed things within our hearts; however, He still chooses to use us because His grace is sufficient enough to cover us. In addition, God always affords us the opportunities to avoid sinful and destructive actions but, sometimes, we yield to temptation.

Historical Context

The Books of Samuel provide insight about how kingship was instituted in Israel and why the Israelites needed a leader when going to battle.⁵ In addition, the two Books of Samuel are combined as one in the Hebrew Bible, and the author is not clearly identified. Although not clearly identified, some scholars believe that the books were written primarily by the prophet Samuel with contributions by the prophets Nathan and Gad.⁶

Next, as stated in Easton's Bible Dictionary,

The first book comprises a period of about a hundred years, and nearly coincides with the life of Samuel. It contains (1) the history of Eli (1-4); (2) the history of Samuel (5-12); (3) the history of Saul, and of David in exile (13-31). The second book, comprising a period of perhaps fifty years, contains a history of the reign of David (1) over Judah (1-4), and (2) over all Israel (5-24), mainly in its political aspects. The last four chapters of Second Samuel may be regarded as a sort of appendix recording various events, but not chronologically. These books do not contain complete histories. Frequent gaps are met with in the record, because their object is to present a history of the kingdom of God in its gradual development, and not of the events of the reigns of the successive rulers. It is noticeable that the section (2 Samuel 11:2-12:29) containing an account of David's sin in the matter of Bathsheba is omitted in the corresponding passage in 1 Chronicles 20.⁷

One of the main characters of the text, Samuel, was a prophet that was assigned to the Children of Israel as a prophet and judge during their transition period from being ruled by judges to the establishment of kingship. Samuel was the God-sent son of Hannah and

⁵ Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, and Jouette M. Bassler, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version: Including the Apocryphal Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006), 538.

⁶ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary: Books of Samuel* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2012).

⁷ M. G. Easton and David E. Graves, *The New Easton Bible Dictionary: A Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Theology, and Literature*, 3rd ed. (Toronto, Canada: Electronic Christian Media, 2016), accessed April 15, 2018, <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Eastons%20Bible%20Dictionary.pdf>.

Elkanah, after Hannah prayed and asked God to bless her womb with a male child, and in return, she would give him back to be used by God all his life.

Due to God's kindness and her covenant promise to God, Samuel's mother Hannah offered him unto the Lord by leaving him at the temple with Eli to be reared. One night while resting, Samuel heard the voice of the Lord calling his name; however, he initially thought it was Eli calling out to him. That encounter would be the first of many conversations between the Lord and Samuel; in addition, Samuel's favor with God and men grew.⁸

Samuel was chosen by God to judge the legal cases of the people because of his integrity and faithfulness concerning the voice of God.⁹ "During the period of the judges, a judge was often a military champion or a deliverer that God would appoint to win victories over Israel's enemies. Some familiar military judges included Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, and Samson."¹⁰ As a judge, Samuel knew that God was not pleased with the Nation of Israel due to their idol worship; therefore, Samuel urged the nation to repent and turn back to God. With the repentance in their hearts, the Nation of Israel would soon be under the divine protection of God from their enemies.

The second main character of the text, King Saul was the first appointed King of Israel, and his leadership would set the tone for God's rejection of disobedience from those who led the Children of Israel.

⁸ Ann Spangler and Robert D. Wolgemuth, *Samuel Men of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Men in Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2002), 145–146.

⁹ Chris Moen, "Samuel the Prophet," Life, Hope and Truth, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/prophets/prophets-of-the-bible/samuel-the-prophet/>.

¹⁰ Moen, "Samuel the Prophet," accessed April 15, 2018, <https://lifehopeandtruth.com/prophecy/prophets/prophets-of-the-bible/samuel-the-prophet/>.

Saul was the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul came from a wealthy family (1 Samuel 9:1) and was tall, dark and handsome in appearance. Scripture states that “there was not a man among the sons of Israel more handsome than he, being taller than any of the people from his shoulder and upward” (1 Samuel 9:2). He was God’s chosen one to lead the scattered nation of Israel, a collection of tribes that did not have a central leader other than God and no formal government. In times of trouble, leaders would arise but never consolidated power of the twelve tribes into one nation.

Years before Saul’s rule, Samuel the prophet was Israel’s religious leader but not a king. In fact, Israel was loosely ruled by judges who presided over domestic squabbles (1 Samuel 8). They were not, however, equipped to rule in times of war. It is no exaggeration to say that Samuel and Saul lived in turbulent times. The Philistines were Israel’s sworn enemies, and war broke out between the two on a regular basis (1 Samuel 4). Because of the constant threat of war and a desire to be like the surrounding nations, the people pressed Samuel to appoint a king to rule over them (1 Samuel 8:5).¹¹

The nation at the center of the text and well-known enemy of the Nation of Israel, the Amalekites, was in the southern region of Israel and was named after its leader Amalek. As stated in text (Gen. 36:11–12, 15–16), Amalek was the son of Eliphaz and the grandson of Esau; therefore, the Amalekites “were a hereditary enemy of Israel.”¹²

The Amalekites were identified as the first enemies that the Israelites encountered in battle within Exodus 17, while they were at Rephidim. Under the orders of Moses, Joshua was able to overcome the Amalekites with his sword. After this defeat, Moses built an altar named “the Lord is my Banner,” and declared that the Lord would be at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation.¹³

Previously in the text, King Saul was ordered to kill King Agag and all of the women, men, children, and cattle that were a part of the nation of Amalek (1 Sam. 15:2-

¹¹ S. Michael Houdmann, “What Can We Learn from the Life of King Saul?” Got Questions Ministries, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.gotquestions.org/life-Saul.html>.

¹² Jewish Virtual Library, “Ancient Jewish History: The Amalekites,” accessed April 17, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-amalekites>.

¹³ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 562.

3); however, King Saul allowed the soldiers to bring back the king and the best of the cattle. King Saul justified his actions by using the customary practice of offering burnt sacrifices to the Lord as an excuse. One of the first accounts of the act of offering burnt offerings to the Lord is found in Exodus 8:20, and this act was carried out by Noah after the flood.

When Noah offered the best animals up to the Lord by burning them, the text says that “The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”¹⁴

Numerous times throughout scripture, we see that animals were offered to the Lord as atonement for sin and as an act of thanksgiving. The act of burning the offerings was carried out by priests who were sanctified before the ritual would take place. This practice was no longer needed after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Literary Context, Form, Structure, and Movement

This text occurs right after Saul is chosen, anointed, and received as the first King of Israel, and before David is appointed as the new King of Israel. The text is also situated at the end of the four chapters (1 Sam. 9-15) that initially provides insight about the life and character of Saul, and a theme that could be applied to this chapter is, “Saul’s rebellion concerning Agag; Samuel rebukes Saul.”¹⁵ This text also serves as an example of the very things that separate man from God, that is, rebellion and disobedience. Next,

¹⁴ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 562.

¹⁵ Vernon J. McGee, *Thru the Bible: Vols. II Joshua-Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1988), 122.

this context reveals God's desire to fully destroy those who attempted to destroy the Children of Israel while in the wilderness (Ex. 17:8-16), that is, the Amalekites.¹⁶

Lastly, Saul's attempt to selfishly cover his sins reflected what was in his heart. With a heart filled with arrogance, actions that went outside the will of God, and the audacity to render to God the very thing he instructed him to destroy, God rejected Saul's kingship. This text is not to be interpreted as God not being one of mercy and second chances, because in chapter fourteen of Samuel, Saul was dishonest by taking credit for a victory that was won by Johnathan.

Vernon McGee outlines the First Book of Samuel in three sections as follows:

I. Samuel: God's prophet, priest, and judge, Chapters 1-8

II. Saul: Satan's man, Chapters 9-15

III. David: God's man, and SAUL: Satan's man, Chapters 16-31.¹⁷

Chapter fifteen of First Samuel is solely devoted to events concerning King Saul and his war with the Amalekites.¹⁸ The latter part of the previous chapter (1 Sam. 14:47-52), provides some detailed insight into Saul's reign, and the beginning of the next chapter (1 Sam. 16:1-13) gives an account of the second king's anointing, that is, King David.¹⁹

Saul's disobedience to the specific instructions given by Samuel provides the setting of his rejection by God that takes place in this chapter. In addition, this was the second time that Saul experienced kingship rejection from God due to misconduct. The

¹⁶ McGee, *Thru the Bible*, 150.

¹⁷ McGee, *Thru the Bible*, 122.

¹⁸ Ralph W. Klein et al., *World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 10, *Samuel: 1* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 146.

¹⁹ Klein et al., *World Biblical Commentary*, 146.

first instance occurred in 13:7b-15a.²⁰ Although the given instructions were harsh and extreme, the requested actions were needed for the Israelites' long-term enemies to be destroyed for good.

Though his title is never referenced in this chapter, Samuel acted in the role of a prophet and this is indicated by Samuel receiving a word from God concerning Saul's disobedience, and Samuel informing Saul of the refutation of his kingship over Israel. In addition, the genre of this chapter is also prophetic in nature and part of the pre-Deuteronomistic history.²¹ Lastly, we see the form of 1 Sam. 15 moves from the "rejection of a dynasty" (1 Sam. 13), the "tragedy that plagued Saul" (1 Sam. 14), to "the rejection of the man himself."²²

Detailed Analysis

"And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" (1 Sam. 15:13-14). Although Samuel went to Saul, Saul initiated the conversation by speaking blessing of the Lord towards Saul and acknowledging that he had completed one of the commandments that was given to him by God. Samuel was previously in conversation with God in verse eleven, he already knew of Saul's disobedience before the Lord.²³

²⁰ Klein et al., *World Biblical Commentary*, 147.

²¹ Klein et al., *World Biblical Commentary*, 148.

²² Klein et al., *World Biblical Commentary*, 148.

²³ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990).

Samuel's response to Saul's confession was a question that challenged what he was hearing versus what was being told to him: "And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed" (1 Sam. 15:15).

Saul then gives a response that places blame and fault on the soldiers of his army by saying "they have brought..."; however, he shifts the focus to inclusive teamwork when he speaks of the partial obedience by saying "...the rest we have utterly destroyed." In essence, Saul was attempting to cover his disobedience with a reason that he felt would be favorable in the eyes of the Lord, that is, offering the best plunder unto Him. Regardless of how Saul navigated his dialogue with Samuel, he was the king of the army; therefore, he is fully responsible for his actions and those of the soldiers.

"Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on" (1 Sam. 15:16). In responding to Saul's statements, Samuel asked Saul to remain and hear what the Lord already told him concerning the task given to him. Samuel's suggestion to "stay" was a foreshadowing moment of the brutal honesty that he was about to pour into Saul's ears. In return, Saul asked Samuel to continue his dialogue; however, this could have been Saul's way of attempting to further prove he had nothing to hide from Samuel.

"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Sam. 15:22-23). Samuel did not restrain

his words while navigating through Saul's disobedience in presenting offerings that should have been destroyed and his blatant shifting of blame. Samuel attempted to point out three points to Saul in these verses, that is, one cannot offer anything to God unless they are connected to Him, God will never accept an offering that has been obtained through disobedience, and one cannot lead God's people to do that which they are unwilling to model. Next, Samuel compares rebellion to witchcraft; therefore, those who take upon rebellion are considered to be worshippers of their own desires and flesh.

“And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD” (1 Sam. 15:24-25). Although Saul's tone has changed in verse twenty-four, one still has to question if he was only partially acknowledging his sin because it was brought to light or if he really was godly sorrowful of his actions. In verse thirty of this text, Saul again acknowledges that he has sinned; however, he asks Samuel to continue worshiping him before the elders and the people. Secondly, Saul continues to use the singular form of the word “commandment” instead of stating that he was asked to carry out the “commandments” of attacking Amalek and utterly destroying all that was connected to his leadership (1 Sam. 15:3). Next, Saul wanted to move the moment along, although he had just confessed to listening to the people over listening to God, and this is asserted because he asked Samuel to “pardon,” “turn,” and “worship” with him now.

Conclusion

In the modern-day church, so many leaders may start out eager to do God's will; however, along the way, something happens to their hearts and motives. King Saul, on the other hand, showed signs of a corrupt heart early on in his kingship. As born-again believers, it is both important and imperative to learn how to search their own hearts and ask God to remove the callused things that separate humanity from Him and His will for their lives. Although King Saul's reign as King of Israel was short, kingship is vital in helping to know and understand several unique but puzzling things about God.

To begin, God will ask believers to do things that do not make sense to them; however, God expects believers to harken to His voice and carry out what He has asked of them. Next, when God speaks, He will also inform someone within their reach about His plans; therefore, believers will be able to hear confirmation from someone other than God. Thirdly, God will elevate or give believers things that they are not ready for, so that they can learn about strengths and weaknesses. In addition, God allows them to be in positions and situations that will cause them to spend more time talking to Him in prayer. Lastly, God will extend His grace and mercy; however, He will not allow them to remain in leadership roles for His people when their hearts are full of selfishness.

New Testament

The Call of Apostle Paul

Acts 9:4-15 states:

He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they

heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

Survey of Text

In Acts 9:4-15, we see a dialogue take place between Saul and Christ, and then between Ananias and Christ. As Saul was on his way to take more Christians captive, something supernatural occurred that left him blind and his followers speechless. A bright light appeared before him and caused him to fall to the ground; however, the text does not imply why Saul's followers were not impacted by this great light. The voice of Christ would soon follow the great light and Saul's fall to the ground.

While on the ground, Christ opened the dialogue by asking Saul a question, which was, "Why do you persecute me?" At that time, Christ was not physically present; therefore, Saul was having a verbal encounter with the Spirit of Christ. The question asked by Christ was an indication of His love for His followers, who Saul was seeking to imprison. Christ wanted Saul to understand that those who have confessed faith in Him were a direct representation of His life and mission, that is, unconditional love.

Saul responded to Christ's question by asking Him a question, "Who are you, Lord?" Saul's response was befitting for the situation that was happening, that is, entering a conversation with a Christ that He did not believe in. Saul's ability to identify

Christ as Lord was also an indication that he was reflecting on what he heard about Christ.

After Christ identified who he was, Saul did what some Christians fail to do, that is, immediately ask God His will concerning their newly converted life. With specific instructions given, Saul stood, but found that he could not see. In addition, his nameless followers were left speechless about what they were witnessing, and Saul had to rely on them to lead him to Damascus. While blind in Damascus, Saul did not eat or drink for three days; however, God was preparing him through sanctification to have his physical sight fully restored by a man named Ananias, and his spiritual sight instituted.

The number of days that Saul found himself blind, without food or water, and relying on others should not be ignored in this text. Based on previous class knowledge, the number three represents “divine wholeness;” therefore, God in all three forms was taking root in Saul’s heart, mind, and spirit. Since Saul’s had a stained history with Christians, God specifically spoke to a man by the name of Ananias and informed him of Saul’s coming.

As this text progresses, more symbolic names are used to inform about what is to come concerning Saul once he reaches Ananias. The name of the street that Saul was located on (Straight), the name of the house that he was in (Judas), and how the laying on of hands would restore unto him the sight that he lost, all indicate the significance of Christ and how He overcame one of his greatest enemies.

Historical Context

The Book of Acts is unique in the sense that it is the only book that contains stories about the early church.²⁴ Although the title of the Book of Acts appears to refer to the Acts of the Apostles, information about the apostles are limited and only one is identified as an author, that is, Luke. The Apostle Luke started a great work in writing about the life of Jesus Christ; however, his focus shifted to the initiation of the early church, its purpose, and its work.²⁵ The Book of Acts also reflects the "tremendous tensions which existed in the early church over the basis of the Gentile missions."²⁶ In addition, Luke also informs readers about how God really works through the Holy Spirit to reach those who are strongly grounded in other religious views that may create division in the church.

Although the Apostle Luke is the primary author of this book, mid-way into it, another great man was introduced by the name of Saul. When Saul was introduced in the text, he was identified as one who was an accessory to murder and was looking to imprison as many Christians as possible.

Saul was named after the first king of Israel and was raised by his mother and father in the city of Tarsus, although he was born a Roman citizen. The city of Tarsus was a major city located in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.²⁷ It is believed that Saul was born between Five B.C. and A.D. Ten; however, Adam Hamilton leans more to

²⁴ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1855.

²⁵ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1856.

²⁶ Howard I. Marshall, *The Book of Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 29.

²⁷ Adam Hamilton, *The Call: The Life and Message of the Apostle Paul* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 18.

A.D. Ten, which means Saul completed his school studies close to the year of Christ's death.²⁸ Adam also goes on to state that Paul's actions of persecuting the Christian movement were an indication that Paul was familiar with Christ's reputation and he too wanted to make a name for himself.

Saul's first noted involvement with Christian martyrdom came when a group of men laid their coats at his feet and he approved their stoning of Stephen. Although the text (Acts 7:58-60) does not imply that Saul casted a stone towards Stephen, it was understood that he laid the first stone due to him being the witness. "Death by stoning required that the witness who testified against the convicted individual drop the first stones upon him and the fact that they laid their coats at Saul's feet likely indicates that he was given authority to act on behalf of the Jewish leaders to oversee the execution."²⁹

During his earlier life, Saul was zealous to impress the Jerusalem council with his unwavering beliefs and strong convictions about Jewish laws and culture. This zeal and unwavering conviction about the law is possibly what caught the attention of God. God saw Saul's weaknesses as strengths that he could use to draw unbelievers unto him.

After experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit while traveling on a road to Damascus and being healed from blindness, his name was changed from Saul to Paul. After his conversion, the Apostle Paul went on to write over half of the New Testament and became a prisoner of the Gospel on several occasions. According to Adam Hamilton, the Apostle Paul spent at least three years in prayer, studying and rethinking

²⁸ Hamilton, *The Call*, 21.

²⁹ Hamilton, *The Call*, 24.

what he previously learned about Jesus Christ; therefore, those three years were spent in silence.³⁰

The Apostle Paul's career of writing the New Testament was grueling, dangerous, but yet rewarding. Due to being limited in free movement throughout the various countries he traveled to, Paul disciplined and instructed various persons to carry the Gospel to the churches of Asia Minor and the outermost parts of the world. After being used by God to widely spread the Gospel by founding churches, making converts, and giving "theological reflections,"³¹ it is believed that the Apostle Paul was executed while under house arrest.

Although the Apostle Paul is widely notable for his conversion that took place in the Book of Acts, another character is equally important for the role that he played in Paul's conversion, that is, Ananias. Ananias of Damascus mentioned in this text should not be confused with the other two who were also mentioned in the Book of Acts (Acts 5 and Acts 23-24). Very little information is known about the earlier life and ministry of Ananias; however, it is known that he was given "key revelations" to impart on the life of the greatest Apostle since the life of Jesus Christ, that is, the Apostle Paul.³²

Ananias was a follower of Christ as evidenced by him being referred to as a disciple and being able to discern who was speaking to him during a vision, that is Christ. Ananias' discipleship of Christ allowed him to respond in obedience, although he questioned Christ because he could not understand why and how he could make a

³⁰ Hamilton, *The Call*, 35.

³¹ Hamilton, *The Call*, 219.

³² Rodney W. Francis, "The Disciple Ananias," *The Gospel Faith Messenger*, accessed August 21, 2018, <http://www.gospel.org.nz/index.php/articles/articles-by-rodney/220-the-disciple-ananias>.

difference in the life of such a widely known, evil man as Saul. Thank God for bold faith, discernment, and obedience from this unsung hero by the name of Ananias.

Literary Context, Form, Structure, and Movement

The Book of Acts is filled with a number of genres including biography, homily, letter, history, and apology; therefore, it is best to describe it as a theological narrative.³³ This context falls between the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and the initial ministry and persecution of Paul. The previous conversion that took place with Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch holds similarity to the conversion that took place between Paul and Ananias. Phillip and Ananias received a vision with instructions from the angel of the Lord and both were obedient.

The movement of this text points out the highlights of the Book of Acts as a whole. This text shows how important it is for one to develop and cultivate their personal relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, that is, being able to identify and obey the voice and vision given by Divinity.

The text explicitly states that Jesus was the one speaking to Saul on the road to Damascus; however, the term Lord is used when identifying who was speaking with Ananias. It is also important to note that Saul asked for the identity of who was speaking to him, but Ananias answered him by saying, “Here I am, Lord,” which indicates he was confident in the voice that was speaking to him.

The author also uses irony in this text to reveal how God chooses unconventional ways and things to have His purpose fulfilled and made whole. Ananias was asked to go

³³ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1856.

to the House of Judas to lay hands on an evil man. Based on previous class knowledge, the House of Judas that is referenced in this text was known as a place where strangers hung out, but it also bore the same name of a man that traded Jesus Christ in exchange for silver. At some point, Paul and Ananias could have questioned whether they were being set up as a ransom or if their lives would be placed in danger.

If a theme could be applied to the Book of Acts as a whole, it would be “Divine Interruptions that Push the Purpose of Christ,” and a theme that could be applied to this context is “Discerning, Trusting, and Obeying the Voice of Christ.” It is believed that the Book of Acts was written by Luke the Physician between Eighty and Ninety C.E. in conjunction with the Book of Luke.³⁴ Vernon McGee outlines the Book of Acts in three sections as follows:

I. Chapters 1-7: The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Jerusalem

II. Chapters 8-12: The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in Judea and Samaria

III. Chapters 13-28: The Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles to the uttermost part of the earth.³⁵

Chapter nine of Acts focuses on the conversion of Paul, his time spent in Damascus, the healing of a man named Aeneas, and the raising of a woman named Dorcas from the dead. The power of Christ is boldly shown through conversion, healing, and miracles; however, these things were being done without his physical presence on earth. Ananias’ obedience and Paul’s conversion to Christianity were not the beginning of the Christian

³⁴ Attridge, Meeks, and Bassler, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1856.

³⁵ J. McGee, “Outline for Acts by Dr. J. Vernon McGee,” Blue Letter Bible, last modified November 15, 2017, accessed April 13, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mcgee_j_vernon/notes-outlines/acts/acts-outline.cfm.

Church; however, both acts would be the start of the major Christian movement throughout the world.

Detailed Analysis

Acts 9:4 states, “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” While on his way to Damascus, a light that was bright caused Saul to fall from his beast and then came the voice. Both features light and voice, can be found when one is encountering a divine revelation.³⁶ It is also important to note that throughout the history of the scriptures, no man has been allowed to see God’s face; therefore, blindness had to occur.

Next, Saul was identified by name and asked a specific question about the persecution that he was carrying out. At this point, the person speaking to Saul was not identified, but Saul was able to identify who the voice belonged to in the next verse because he knew who he was persecuting, and because his ears became open.

“‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’” (Acts 9:5-6). “Paul’s reply was one of puzzlement” and not of recognition for who was speaking to him.³⁷ Jesus did not keep Paul in suspense; he clearly answered him and identified Himself as the one that was being persecuted by Paul. Paul was committed to preserving and defending the God of the Jewish people; however, he did not realize that it was the God of the Jews who raised Christ from the dead.

³⁶ Howard, *The Book of Acts*, 169.

³⁷ Howard, *The Book of Acts*, 169.

From a split moment in time, Paul's faith in who was speaking to him was tested. Jesus instructed Paul to get up from the ground and go into the city, and he would then receive more instructions. Paul's obedience this early in his conversion was an indication of what was to come from him. Obedience to God is something that one must be intentional about from the very beginning of the conversion experience; however, one's growth in Christ will allow one to get to a spiritual point of always obeying instructions from God.

"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone" (Acts 9:7). Those who were traveling with Paul found themselves with no words to describe what they were witnessing. The men were not given identities; however, they would become instrumental in leading the blind Paul into the city to receive his healing. What a mystical experience! Since the men did not speak or have identities, one can assume that the miraculous power of Christ moved them to obedience as well. This idea is drawn because the men were companions of Paul and were initially headed to assist Paul in the persecution of Christians.

"Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything" (Acts 9:8-9). The light of Christ was so bright, Paul used the natural action of closing his eyes; however, when he opened them up, he was not able to see. The strong-willed Paul found himself relying on the guidance of those he was once leading. In addition, the text indicated that Paul did not eat or drink; therefore, it suggests that he was fasting. The questions that arises is: was this fasting due to him being in

shock from the encounter that he had with Christ or was he denying himself food and water until he received his healing?

“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight’” (Acts 9:10-12). In these verses, we see the introduction of Ananias, a disciple from Damascus who was able to discern and trust the voice of Christ. Ananias responded to the Lord in a confident manner by saying, “Yes, Lord,” unlike Paul, who responded in a puzzled manner about who was speaking to him. The Lord also provided Ananias with confirmation that Paul had seen Ananias laying hands on him, praying for and expecting his visit. What great consolation from the Lord for a challenging task.

“‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name’” (Acts 9:13-14). In these verses, we see Ananias start to dialogue with the Lord. It does not appear that Ananias was speaking back to the Lord due to rebellion, instead, he was speaking more so out of concern for his freedom and possibly his life. Paul was a man of dangerous reputation and he was to be feared. Next, Ananias identified whose authority Paul was acting under and what his assignment was while in Damascus. The chief priests were well respected and held in high regard as being the closest persons to God.

“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel’” (Acts

9:15). Although it appears that Ananias had a natural fleshly response of asking God for clarity, God again instructs him to go. In addition, God informed Ananias that Paul was now God's chosen instrument regardless of Paul's reputation. An instrument is something that is played or used by a musician to make beautiful sounds; therefore, God wanted to become the user of Paul to get the message of Christ out to the Jews and Gentiles. God knew that the beautiful sound of souls being saved would be a direct result of Paul proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

This text provides an example of how discerning, trusting, and obeying the voice of God can carry a born-again believer into their divine purpose and get them through challenging seasons in life. The Apostle Paul was a new convert in this text; however, he proved that having a personal relationship with Christ is more important than going to a building for corporate worship. The latter statement is not to say that the church does not serve a significant role in a believer's life.

Next, the Apostle Paul did not respond to the voice of Christ like Ananias, who previously had a relationship with the Lord; instead, he willingly exercised trust and obedience without the Lord instructing him more than once. Paul gave a response to the voice of Christ that most mature Christians would give after years of cultivating a relationship with the Lord and learning how to truly discern His voice.

Thirdly, this text shows Christ in an open manner, allowing miracles and healing to take place, without warning, against the witnesses testifying of what they saw. During

His earthly ministry, Christ was intentional about protecting His life before going to the cross; however, in this text, we see that He was operating in His role as Savior.

With the institution of the early church, it was befitting for this account of the Apostle Paul's conversion to take place in the Book of Acts. When one begins reading the Book of Acts, its contents can be mistaken as a book covering the early days of the Christian Church and how significant the Holy Spirit is to the church. In addition to serving a significant role for the church, the Apostle Paul's conversion on the Damascus road proves that the Holy Spirit and salvation can be obtained outside the four walls of a church building.

Tim Kuepfer pointed out a significant factor of the Apostle Paul's conversion story, that is, Apostle Paul's testimony carrying more weight than biblical history alone.

Kuepfer states:

Testimony provides our fundamental access to history and so it is at Christian the heart not only of historical studies but also of biblical studies. Testimony is, at its core, storytelling. Testimony is a recounting of what we have seen and heard. It is our connection to the past. It always is, of course, a particular interpretation of the past. Testimony has its own ideology and theology, its own presuppositions and point of view, its own narrative and rhetorical structures. If we are to gain access to history, if we are to attain any knowledge of the past, we must put faith in the trustworthiness of some testimony. New Testament scholarship is currently producing groundbreaking work on the Gospels as eyewitness testimony to the historical Jesus.³⁸

Paul's calling and ministry were centered around his purpose of preaching the Gospel of Christ throughout the world; however, one must not miss the focal point of how and why Paul was able to get unbelievers to buy into the Christ he was offering. Paul's testimony

³⁸ Tim Kuepfer, "'I Saw the Light': The Significance of the Apostle Paul's Conversion Testimony," *Vision (Winnipeg, Man.)* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 13–19, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001795899&site=ehost-live>.

was testament of the power of Christ dying on the Cross. Paul's reputation preceded him before his encounter with Ananias and others near him; however, what the onlookers could not explain is how and why the same Saul was now showing the love of Christ. Preachers of the gospel should have a testimony that challenges others to try the Christ that is being offered because one can only experience such conversions from a supernatural being.

Lastly, the Gospel of Christ alone can indeed bring one to a curiosity about Christ; however, it is the personal accounts and testimonies that can push unbelievers into a relationship with Christ. Sometimes, it can appear as if the closest family and friends are the hardest ones to reach but, if an individual has truly changed and taken on the image of Christ, they will be more likely to follow in our steps. When preachers have unsaved family members and friends who refuse to listen or talk about a potential relationship with Christ, one should take spiritual inventory about who they really are and how they are portraying a life with Christ. If unbelievers cannot identify the difference in our lifestyle and their lifestyle, that is an indicator that we may not be putting off our old man.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

When thinking about Jesus Christ, all humankind that has accepted his purpose and mission while on Earth can agree that He is love. Christ made the ultimate sacrifice of giving His life as a ransom for humankind. In addition, Christ did not give His life and then leave humankind on Earth with writings about Him; He left the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In order for one to fully understand the purpose of the Holy Spirit and how it works, they must learn how to pray to and listen to the voice of God. When a born-again believer learns how to properly discern the voice of God, they are more likely to obey and trust God to a greater extent; but other than biblical characters, is there anyone else who can attest to clearly hearing God speak? Over the years, biblical scholars have become fascinated with an anchoress and theologian by the name of Julian of Norwich.

Julian completed a work entitled *Divine Revelations of Love* some twenty years after her personal testimony of receiving sixteen visions concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit while she was ill. In addition, Julian's narrative tremendously added to the Medieval Mysticism movement during the fourteenth century by providing information concerning sin, suffering like Christ, spiritual growth, asceticism, and healing.

According to the online Encyclopedia Britannica,

Mysticism is the practice of religious ecstasies (religious experiences during alternate states of consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them. The term mystic is derived from the Greek noun *mystes*, which originally designated an initiate of a secret cult or mystery religion. In Classical Greece (5th–4th century BCE) and during the Hellenistic Age (323 BCE–330 CE), the rites of the mystery religions were largely or wholly secret. The term *mystes* is itself derived from the verb *myein* (“to close,” especially the eyes or mouth) and signified a person who kept a secret. Early Christianity appropriated the technical vocabulary of the Hellenistic mysteries but later disavowed secrecy, resulting in a transformation of the meaning of *mystes*. In subsequent Christian usage, *mystes*, or mystic, referred to practitioners of doctrinally acceptable forms of religious ecstasy.¹

Julian did not provide specific details about her illness; however, it is safe to say that her illness may have pushed her to an unconscious state that afforded her the opportunity to thoroughly examine Christianity in a mystical manner. Julian desired to deepen her relationship with God so she could inform others about the Father of Christ in a manner that would invite them to learn more about Him.²

In this section of work, the life of Julian of Norwich will be examined along with her theology concerning God’s divine love, the early formation of feminism, and the movement of Mysticism during the fourteenth century. As these focal points are explored, it is important to remember that women were not allowed to have much voice in public settings such as the church or places of worship; however, the God of all creation has shown countless times throughout history that He is willing to use whoever is available.

¹ Dan Merkur, “Mysticism,” Encyclopædia Britannica, August 25, 2015, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mysticism>.

² Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*, vol. 2, *Studies in Medieval Mysticism* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 8.

Julian of Norwich: Autobiography

Julian of Norwich can be considered an unsung spiritual counselor during the late 1300s or fourteenth century. Julian was a transparent theologian who exposed very little about her upbringing, family, or life in general. According to Christopher Abbot, scholars do not know where Julian originally came from, her social status, or what landed her in an anchoress's cell.³ In addition, Julian's death date is speculated to be around the year of 1430; however, the evidence from Norwich is inconclusive.⁴

Julian was a medieval personality, and numerous groups have been formed under her name in honor of her transparent knowledge and experiences with Christianity and God. Secondly, a religious order was also formed under her name.⁵ One notable reason Julian is appreciated in the world of theology is because she wrote in first person about her spiritual encounters, and from those spiritual encounters, she provided a bold theological vision.⁶

Julian's bold theological vision caused her to contribute significant insights about the divine love of Christ through meditation, prayer, and intimate time spent with Him. These insights were shared with the world when Julian wrote a book entitled *The Showings of the Love of God*.⁷

³ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 3.

⁴ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 3.

⁵ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 2.

⁶ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 2.

⁷ Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1987), 3.

In her book, Julian informs of how she prayed, how these prayers were answered while she was severely sick, and vivid accounts of sixteen visions she had when she was in extremis.⁸ Although Julian had a life-changing experience from these visions while on her sick bed, according to her own accounts, she recorded about the spiritual encounter in her book more than twenty years after it occurred.⁹

Julian's theme in her writings focused on "indivisibility of self-knowledge and knowledge of God, particularly strong in medieval monastic tradition" and closely associated with St. Augustine.¹⁰ Julian has been associated with St. Augustine and his notable work *Confessions* due to similar divinely life experiences and taking the time to capture the experiences in a way that gained the attention of Christians. Although both shared similarities in their experiences and how they captured them, Julian's content was much different.

Julian produced her writing in one of the busiest cities in England, Norfolk, when the first English Bible was translated.¹¹ This information is significant as it helps give an understanding of the characteristics of the time and how the developing Christian Church may have "impinged on Julian and her readers."¹² Women were not held with high regard during this time; therefore, Julian's life as an anchoress was favorable for her experiences

⁸ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 3.

⁹ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 3.

¹⁰ Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, 10.

¹¹ Wallace David, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Paul Frenzel, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 211, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://books.google.com/books?id=GtPSOP3jvLYC>.

¹² Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 5.

and writings. From such a lifestyle, Julian learned and used self-discipline that taught her how to not be mentally involved with distractions of life.

According to Jone Johnson Lewis,

An anchoress is (was) a woman who withdraws from secular life for religious purposes, a female religious hermit or recluse. The male term is anchorite. Anchoresses and anchorites lived in seclusion, often in remote locations or walled into a room with only a shuttered window through which food was passed. The position of anchorite is still recognized in canon law of the Roman Catholic church as one form of consecrated life. The position was not one, generally, of complete seclusion.

The anchoress was to be kept in connection with a church, and visitors to the anchoress, who could talk to her through a window in her cell, often came seeking prayers or practical advice. She spent her time in prayer and contemplation, but often also engaged in writing and such typical women's activities as embroidery. The anchoress was expected to eat and dress simply.

An anchoress needed permission from a bishop to take up the life of semi-reclusion. He would determine if she was likely to adapt to the life of an anchoress and whether she had adequate financial support (this was not a way for the poor to be fed). The bishop would oversee the anchoress' life and make sure she was cared for well. A special rite of enclosure marked the agreement between the church and the anchoress, and her dedication to the enclosed life. This ceremony echoed a burial or entombment, with last rites, as ritually the anchoress was dead to the world.¹³

Although an exact date of her death is not known, it is believed that Julian lived a life full of prayer and contemplation until the early 1400s. Julian has been credited as being the first woman in England to write an entire book in the English language.¹⁴ Lastly, scholars are unsure if this mystic theologian's real name is indeed Julian; therefore, she has been

¹³ Jone Johnson Lewis, "Anchoress: Medieval Religious Life for Women," ThoughtCo, accessed April 17, 2018, <http://www.thoughtco.com/all-about-anchoress-3529694>.

¹⁴ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 47.

identified as Julian of Norwich due to the anchor hold being located in the St. Julian Church.¹⁵

Revelation of Divine Love: The Sixteen Shewings

As mentioned earlier, while being bedridden and sick for three days and three nights, Julian of Norwich gave an account of sixteen visions that she received from Jesus Christ during the year 1373 on the thirteenth day of May, as recorded in her book *Julian of Norwich*. Julian self-identified as one who was a “simple creature who was unlettered.”¹⁶

Although Julian considered herself to be simple and illiterate, she desired three things from her mystical visions: to have a full understanding about the physical sufferings of Christ through her own illness, to be purged by God’s grace so she could live a life with more meaning, and to have wounds of contrition, kind compassion, and steadfast longing towards God.¹⁷

The first vision gives an account of the sufferings of Christ and connects his sufferings with the love that He possesses for humankind. It is with this first vision that Julian speaks of God being in the form of three persons, the Trinity. In addition to the Trinity being shewed in this first vision, Julian also identifies herself as a “sinful creature living in wretched flesh.”¹⁸ Lastly, Julian magnifies Mary, the Mother of Christ, during

¹⁵ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 4.

¹⁶ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 3.

¹⁷ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 5.

¹⁸ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 8.

this vision and implicates her as one who is just **as** worthy as Christ; however, Mary remains humble and full of grace.

The second vision alludes to Christ dying due to his “dearworthy” passion to save humankind. Julian does a remarkable job describing how she was able to witness this vision in her body, spirit, and in the Word of God. As she references God in her body, this can take on two meanings.

The first interpretation could be understood as Julian associating the physical pain in her body to the pain that Christ felt in his body while suffering and dying on the cross. This vision can also insinuate Christ being Lord over one’s life after they have invited Him to do so. As stated by Julian, one must take on the likeness of Christ. Lastly, in order for one to fully appreciate Christ’s dying for humankind, one must be able to visually see what He endured and how brutal His death was from a spiritual perspective.

The third vision magnifies the power of God as Creator of all things, His mighty wisdom, and His love that has caused everything to come into existence. In addition, Julian raised a question that should be addressed, that is, “what is sin?”¹⁹ First, Julian intertwined God and His creations as one; therefore, she felt that sin carried no deed within man.

Although the creation has taken sin as a lustful refuge, Julian was shown how grace and mercy are made useful in making mankind “full and right.”²⁰ This “rightfulness” that comes from the mercy and grace of God is what assists in making the

¹⁹ Julian and Grace Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, UK: Methuen, 1901), last modified September 18, 2017, accessed March 13, 2018, https://books.google.com/books/about/Revelations_of_Divine_Love.html?id=2o8NAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²⁰ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 27.

creation look more like the Creator. Lastly, this vision asserts that being able to easily do good deeds and not yielding to evil deeds comes for the righteous man because of God being within.

Julian's fourth mystical vision takes the mind to the final hours of Christ before His death on the cross. The tone of Julian's writing at this point appears to be one of agony and sadness. This conclusion is drawn as she states, "The fair skin was broken full deep into the tender flesh with sharp smiting all about the sweet body."²¹ Christ's body was as sweet as His blood, which made remission of sin possible for humankind.

In addition, Julian felt that the blood of Christ was plentiful enough to reach every creation of God. In ending this vision, although the blood of Christ ran down Calvary's hill, it was still powerful enough to ascend into heaven in order to prepare an eternal home for mankind. This offer of eternal peace for heaven has been available to all who believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

It is during Julian's fifth revelation that she begins to describe the state of the physical pain in her body. With this physical pain in her body, Julian describes how she heard the voice of God saying to her, "herewith is the fiend overcome."²² Julian felt that this statement was indicative of the passion that Christ has over the fiend. Although the word "fiend" has two meanings, "one who is very devoted and one who is wicked,"²³ Julian referenced the latter as she described how powerful Christ's unfailing redemption is to man.

²¹ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 29.

²² Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 31.

²³ "Fiend," Merriam-Webster, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fiend>.

Next, Julian made a statement that may cause some to question the validity of God's interactions with the Children of Israel due to their sins. Julian stated that “but in my God there may be no wrath, as to my sight.”²⁴ Julian was insinuating that God as the Creator could do no wrong in her eyes; however, believers must not confuse God’s tolerance as an inability to bring forth wrath due to wrongdoing. Lastly, Julian found some joy and laughter in seeing how God overcame the evilness of the devil.

Next, the sixth revelation suggests that a celebration of worshipping was taking place in heaven as a reward for the “blessed” servants of God.²⁵ This celebration that Julian speaks of places her at a table in the heavenly house of God while having a feast. This “blissful” feast also included direct gratitude towards Christ the Lord for the pain and agony that he endured during his sufferings.

Lastly, Julian stated that the believer has the opportunity to experience three degrees of bliss during this vision: worshipful thanks, blessed creatures in heaven making known to all of heaven that the worshipful thanksgiving should occur in heaven, and a new gladdening shall have eternal reign.

The seventh mystical vision expounds on the significance of God’s grace and joy in spite of our flesh and desires. This grace and joy that Julian speaks of was so profound that she felt that there was nothing on earth that could cause her any grief or sorrow.

Secondly, she was still experiencing physical pain in her body during this vision; however, Julian held faith, hope, and charity in truth.²⁶ Thirdly, this vision was

²⁴ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 31.

²⁵ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 33.

²⁶ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 35.

significant in bringing an answer to every believer's question about trials that they may experience, that is, rest for the soul even when the trials become too heavy for the believer to continue.

Fourthly, it is clear in this vision that Julian is unclear about why she may be going through the physical pain of these visions. This is evident as she states that a weary soul is not always the direct result of sin; therefore, the experience should not be viewed as punishment. Julian felt that she was not worthy of having a feeling such as the above mentioned, but because of God's free will, she found peace in the midst of calamity.

Lastly, Julian ends discussion of this vision by saying, "For it is God's will that we hold us in comfort with all our might: for bliss is lasting without end, and pain is passing and shall be bought to nought for them that shall be saved. And therefore, it is not God's will that we follow the feelings of pain sorrow and mourning for them, but that we suddenly pass over, and hold us in endless enjoyment."²⁷

Vision eight implicates the final moments of Christ dying as being painful and cruel.²⁸ These final moments of Christ dying describe him as being "brown and black-like" with a sweet face that was bloodless and pale while dying.²⁹ While Julian describes this vision, gratitude should fill one's heart knowing that Christ was once in a fleshly body that was well put together; however, He was painfully broken beyond recognition for the sake of redemption for man. This redemption of man occurred for the just and unjust; therefore, some will never experience the beauty of a Savior who has made

²⁷ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 36.

²⁸ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 2.

²⁹ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 36.

eternal life possible. For those who choose to believe, they are able to look forward to another life after this one has come to an end. In addition, accepting Christ as the redeemer of souls also affords the privilege of peace during our carnal existence.

Secondly, this pain that Christ endured was “bitter, sharp, and long,”³⁰ but His fleshly body endured until His spirit could satisfy the will of God. Julian stated that the suffering was so long that it felt like it went on for seven days and seven nights. In addition, Christ held a “double thirst in body and spirit.” This bodily thirst was a direct cause of the sharp sufferings diminishing the moisture in His body. Also, the weight of His body as it hung on the cross and the nails that pierced His hands and feet caused great wounds that allowed life to flow from His body. These said calamities should help us to understand how profound Christ’s love is for humanity; therefore, one should be willing to show Him how much gratitude we hold in our hearts by cheerfully giving of ourselves for His Kingdom.

Thirdly, Julian elaborated on how the crown of thorns held the dry blood and flesh of Christ while the sweetness of His face yielded not to the option of coming down from the Cross. These painful visions brought about more pain in Julian’s body as she took on Christ’s pains; therefore, she did not feel that she could adequately continue to express all that was entering her mind. Believers should become emotional when considered how Christ refused to give up on His assignment. Endurance and stamina does not come easily on this journey but, it is possible to achieve when we know, learn, and are intentional about the calling and purposes that God has placed on our lives.

³⁰ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 36.

Julian became curious about whether there could be any pain worse or greater than that which was experienced by Christ. This curiosity also brought an answer as she reflected on those who have to experience hell, and she determined that those cast into an eternal hell had far more suffering to endure. Not only did Julian experience the suffering of Christ, she felt that all creatures shared in this suffering as well. Lastly, Julian's decision to embrace and accept the sufferings of Christ as her own allowed her to understand the grace and joy given through His death.

The ninth revelation magnifies how Christ's death gave Him access to complete the Trinity as Christians know it today and bring a sense of "fullness" to heaven.³¹ It is now that Julian identifies God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit as "three heavens having equal bliss."³² Although these three heavens are equal, Julian identifies how they all serve a different purpose.

To begin, God the Father is revealed as Creator and Ruler over humankind through Jesus Christ in the flesh and His ability to love humankind unto His very own death in the first heaven. Since God, the Father, is the Creator and the giver of Christ, humankind should find Him worthy to be praised.

Next, the second blissful heaven pertaining to God the Son, Julian saw the suffering of Christ yet again; however, this time, she could not see the beginning of this suffering, only the end thereof. With the end of the suffering of Christ, a view of His eternal love and passion was at full reign.

³¹ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 2.

³² Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 47.

Lastly, this third heaven, as Julian calls it, held Christ's last moments in the flesh in five manners: bleeding of the head, discoloring of His face, plentiful bleeding of the body, deep dying from pain, and joyful bliss from the salvation that came at the end of His suffering.

The tenth revelation ushers in heaven as a host for those who have understood the significance of the wound that was placed in the side of Jesus Christ. The piercing in the side of Christ came as a measure to confirm His death. This confirmation brought about loud cheering and glad hearts because all humankind now had opportune access to heaven. Knowing of this eternal opportunity to behold the heavenly home, Julian found never-ending joy and bliss in her spirit.

The eleventh shewing reveals how Christ's purpose of becoming Savior to the world caused His heart to be conflicted between dying and remaining on Earth with His mother. Julian gave an account of a dialogue between Christ and His mother that showed Christ being a loving son who viewed His mother as one of the many creations from God.

Christ's mother, Mary, was also rejoicing during this shewing instead of crying about her son laying down His life. Although Christ gave conversation to His mother and she in returned rejoiced, Julian stated that she was unable to see the body of Mary during this time. The gospels briefly mention Christ's mother at the foot of the Cross; however, one must not miss the significance of the once young virgin who gave of her own body for Christ.

Julian saw how worthy the Lord is in her twelfth vision, and how humankind should have a heart of gratitude concerning His deeds in the thirteenth vision. Now that Christ has conquered death during the twelfth vision, Julian is no longer seeing the

broken, bruised body of Christ, but a whole Christ who has properly redeemed mankind and appears to be glorious.

The thirteenth vision informs of why Christ's passion and death were justified, as sin had taken hold of man. Julian was at a point where she found sin did not bare any substance, pain, or purpose because Christ's bloodshed covered it to appear no more. The pain and brokenness that was previously seen because of sin was now purged, and the pain that Julian felt because of the sufferings of Christ was now seen as victory.

It is also in this vision that Julian was shown that she had no blame for what she was experiencing in her body. Lastly, with Christ's passion "excusing" the sin of man, man was able to show gratitude for the eternal deed. "The Savior brought Salvation" to a dying world.³³

Julian's fourteenth vision establishes the Lord as the foundation for a believer's prayer, and that prayer should be filled with righteousness and steadfast trust. According to Julian, "but yet often times our trust is not full: for we are not sure that God heareth us, as we think because of our unworthiness, and because we feel right nought, (for we are as barren and dry oftentimes after our prayers as we were afore)."³⁴ These sentiments point out the importance of the believer having enough trust in God that a single prayer of supplication should be enough for God to hear us.

In addition to having a full trust in God, born-again believers should learn how the voice of God sounds in their spiritual ears. Next, feeling unworthy is not uncommon amongst Christians; however, once one has a full understanding of why Christ died for

³³ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 61.

³⁴ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 84.

humanity, one should be compelled to know that it is the blood of Christ that make one worthy of God's ear and heart.

Furthermore, because the blood of Christ is the covering and He is the mediator, believers should not feel the same after lamenting in prayer to the Father through the Son. Ultimately, Julian feels that the believer should not lack the fruits of the spirit, the joy that only Christ can give, or a life that is growing according to enormous faith in God.

The fifteenth mystical vision shifts to the significance of Christ dying and ascending to heaven, that is, the opportunity for born-again believers to be freed from their mortal bodies and live in heaven for eternity. After reflecting on the woes of life and this world, Julian was finally ready to have her spirit leave her earthen vessel.

In addition, Julian stated that she did not feel that she wanted to live due to her own sinful nature. It is also in this vision that Julian hears a response from Christ and He informs her that she will be delivered from her bodily pain, rise above to heaven, and no longer have any earthen needs.

This response from Christ caused Julian to see God rewarding all born-again believers for their patience during their hours of suffering; therefore, heaven was shown as a vivid place of blissful joy. Also, with this blissful joy came a new body that was erected in the form of a child. This child-like body was metaphoric to the strength, pureness, and presumptuous longevity of a newly born infant.

Julian then goes on to suggest that believers should often think about the heavenly host and what it beholds for born-again believers. As believers begin to reflect on heaven in a daily manner, a desire to live a life pleasing to God and a heart filled with gratitude should occur. Equally importantly, believers should have a zealous desire to worship God

often and understand how much charity towards our fellow brothers and sisters mean to Him.

Lastly, the sixteenth vision is one of “joyful bliss” between the believer and the Holy Trinity while in heaven.³⁵ This celebratory encounter also entails how Christ has been a great protector of all humankind from the hand of the enemy, and Julian referenced this encounter as “conclusion and confirmation of the fifteenth vision.”³⁶ Julian was also intentional about reflecting back to the first vision, when the extreme pain in her body went away due to reflecting on how blissful heaven will be for every born-again believer.

As mentioned above, this sixteenth vision was one of celebration and praise to Christ for the sin debt that He paid for all who believe. This celebration also turned into a worship setting that pointed out the various attributes of Christ. Christ was identified as the King of all kings, God and Man, a fair person of large statue, most Majestic, the Highest Bishop, and most worshipful Lord.³⁷

So often during the Christian learning process, a big emphasis is placed on heaven and how important it is for believers. In addition, believers are encouraged to worship while on Earth as it is the primary functional element of heaven. Julian described this worshipful celebration of God in heaven as being delectable and restful because there was no end for it. The no end that Julian speaks of was due to Christ’s gift of eternal life for those who believe in Him.

³⁵ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 2.

³⁶ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 164.

³⁷ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 167.

Next, Christ again spoke to Julian and gave her specific instructions and they were, “Wit it now well that it was no raving that thou sawest to-day: but take it and believe it, and keep thee therein, and comfort thee therewith, and trust thou thereto: and thou shalt not be overcome.³⁸” Christ wanted Julian to hide the visions that were shown to her in her heart and fully believe all that she saw in the spiritual realm. In addition, Christ was recommending that Julian allow her spiritual encounter to be the comfort of all the pains that she may feel as she remained on her sick bed. Lastly, the words that Christ uttered to Julian were to serve as confirmation that she was indeed experiencing all that her spiritual eyes were seeing.

Conclusion

Julian’s visions can serve as a notice to any doubting believer as to who God really is, the true power of God, and why every believer should look forward to go to heaven. These visions were deep in meaning and significant in confirming that God has a voice that every believer should learn. In learning the voice of God, born-again believers can have direct access to God’s will and purpose concerning their life.

Julian’s visions also provide hope at a time when so many are questioning if God is real. When looking at the sin-ravaged world that appears to bare little to no signs of the imprint of God, it causes unbelievers to question why they should believe in Christ. Julian’s visions are necessary because they assist in giving a vivid imagination about how one really can experience God. In no way is this to say that every believer will have a

³⁸ Julian and Warrack, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 167.

Julian of Norwich encounter with the Trinity; however, every believer should have their unique experience that confirms that God is real.

Although Julian gained relief in her ill-stricken body during her encounter, at the end of the experience, she noted that the pain returned to her body. However, when the pain returned to her body, Julian quickly reflected back on the words that Christ spoke to her, that is, believe what she saw, trust what she felt while seeing, keep in mind what took place, and the fiend who seeks to overcome her will not be able to do so. Julian discerned how the voice of God sounded, and she was able to fully trust the process that she was going through. The process of suffering is not easy; however, it assists the believer in fully understanding what Christ endured so He could save this dying world.

When Julian fell on her sick bed, she thought it was her time to die; however, her illness would be the very experience that pushed her to desire learning more about the voice of God and her visions. Just as Julian, born-again believers should seek to learn the voice of God as they grow and go along the Christian journey. Learning the voice of God can reduce erroneous ways of the believer and eliminate foolish decisions that lead to heartbreak and shame. In addition, knowing who is speaking can push a believer to trust any instructions that are given. At times, God can give instructions that do not seem to make sense; however, He still requires each believer to be obedient to them.

In closing this section, Julian's revelations about the sufferings of Christ, herself, and the voice of God clearly demonstrate that spiritual encounters with the God of our faith will occur. Everyone will not experience God in the same manner; however, one should have a divine encounter that leaves one saying, without a doubt, that the God of our faith is real. The experience that humanity has should become the personal

testimonies that one often reflects on so that they are reminded of what God has individually shown them. In addition, one should recall the divine experiences when they are unsure of a strange process that God is asking them to fully trust and obey.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Spiritual growth is essential for every Christian that desires shaping, molding, and to live in an image of Christ. Unlike mathematical measurements, one cannot measure spiritual growth with a ruler or with pencil and paper. One measures and determines spiritual growth by a person's ability to navigate through the storms of life knowing that an invisible God is present at all times. The assured faith in the presence of God will cause the Christian believer to talk to God and, in return, allow God to talk to them. How can the Christian believer recognize the sound of God's voice before entering into a storm? Various ways exist for how to recognize God's voice. This chapter explores the implications that theology can have on the overall growth of Christian believers.

When persons take the time to analyze and connect how their personal experiences help to shape their thought processes about the religious faiths and practices to which they gravitate, they will then start their spiritual growth. Age, gender, nor race limit this type of spiritual growth. However, it may take others longer to develop unwavering faith and patience in God. A stunted spiritual growth could indicate several things, such as, a poor understanding of the scriptures, the absence of intimacy with God outside of the formal church setting, the reception of sermons from a leader with poor exegetical insight, or an unbelief in the possibility of modernized movement of God.

According to Merriam Webster, theology is the study of religious faith, practice, and experience.¹

Next, a context's leader could largely influence the theology of any context. However; the Holy scriptures should always remain as the foundational focal point when attempting to impact spiritual growth. Although biblical theology will not be a primary factor in this writing, this chapter references it when articulating how one can hear God's voice through the many passages in the Bible. Biblical theology allows for the modern exegesis of scriptures that brings about an emphasis to practical application in everyday living. In addition, one can consider biblical theology as the bridge between exegetical theology and systematic theology.²

In continuing the navigation through the perplexities around theology, it brings to mind a thought from Wayne A. Grudem's book, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grudem references systematic theology as being any study that provides an answer on what the whole Bible teaches persons today on any given topic.³ Systematic theology sits within the theoretical area of theology and is one of the three disciplines in this area; biblical and historical are the other two. Systematic theology is very broad in the sense that it allows for more detailed thought processes during the discussions around specific Christian doctrines.

¹ "Theology," Merriam-Webster.com, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>.

² James Riley Estep, Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: B and H Academic, 2008).

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 2007).

Broader discussions on specific Christian doctrines such as process, science and religion, and charismatic theologies can increase a born-again believer's understanding of the voice of God and God's ways. In addition, the previously mentioned theologies can also enhance one's perspectives concerning the overall mission of Christ and salvation. Generally, at the center or at the root of sound Christian theology is the Holy Bible and the Apostle's Creed as the latter is one of the most widely used summaries of the Christian faith.⁴ The Holy scriptures and the Apostle's Creed both identify God the Father as the Creator of all existence, Jesus Christ as the son of God who died rose from the dead, and the Holy Spirit as the everlasting voice that should guide Christians until Christ's return.

Lastly, good Christian theology should possess accurate revelations about the Holy Trinity, individual thought processes, and biblical history as well as the two primary anchors of Christian—discipleship and doctrine. The Trinity also expresses the distinctive identity of the Christian God.⁵ In elaborating more about distinctive identity, all Christians should educate themselves about the identity and characteristics of Christ. Therefore, all must learn how to accurately identify when the voice of God is speaking. Without doubt, God speaks to believers through the scriptures. However, believers must not become dependent upon seeing words in order to hear from God.

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, *Theology: The Basics* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Son, 2017).

⁵ McGrath, *Theology*.

Practical Theology: Christian Education

Every place of worship should and typically has various forms of Christian education opportunities. These Christian education opportunities include, but are not limited to, mid-week Bible studies, Sunday School, discipleship training, new member orientation, and so forth.⁶ One can receive Christian education in three different fashions including formal, informal, and socialization.⁷ Within the Christian church setting, churches should utilize formal, informal, and socialization fashions for Christian education in order for everyone to have the opportunity to learn the essentials of Christian theology. In addition, spiritual growth and in-depth understanding of God and God's ways directly relate to how churches educate Christians in formal, informal, and socialization fashions.

Formal Christian education has structure, an understanding of the roles of the teacher and students, and typically has a set or approved curriculum. These formal opportunities to enhance Christian education within the church happens during the Sunday school hour, Bible study, during the week, national denominational annual meetings, and seminary trainings. In addition, persons who received formal training should teach formal Christian education. During such learning opportunities, teachers should seek to use practical and exegetical findings to demonstrate how believers can apply the scriptures to their daily lives. Lastly, the church should evaluate formal

⁶ Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 23.

⁷ Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 23.

education to ensure that Christian students learn the key elements of who God is, the significance of Christ, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Next, informal Christian educational opportunities directly relate to a specific task that a specific ministry within the church will execute.⁸ For example, a church that organizes an evangelism campaign may spend several weeks specifically preparing and training members on proper canvassing. With specific training occurring before members go out to evangelize, they would more likely reach the unsaved in an approachable and respectful manner. Informal education opportunities should clearly identify and define the roles of those participating in such opportunity. Problems can arise and fellowship could become compromised absent the clear identification of roles during informal learning. Informal education also allows for the learners to ask questions and give feedback as needed.

Thirdly, of the three mentioned learning styles, socialization may be the most widely used method among Christians. Socialization education can occur almost anywhere outside and inside the church. Today's world focuses much on social media that openly welcomes people from all walks of life on a daily basis. Before the introduction of social media, people only socialized with each other via the telephone or face-to-face. These limitations restricted persons to formal and informal Christian educational opportunities on a weekly basis. However, with the implementation of social media, Christians have the chance to learn from the comfort of their homes, communities, and other public spaces. Socialization learning creates opportunities for Christian believers to share with one another based on their personal experiences, own

⁸ Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 35.

understanding of the scriptures, measurements of spiritual growth, and their interpretation of how God speaks.

Lastly, every Christian must possess an interest in Christian education opportunities in order for spiritual growth to occur. This interest should also push believers to receive all learning opportunities that are made available, and to focus more on the message than the messenger. Christian education should go beyond basic biblical education, and all religious-based resources should come secondary to biblical findings. Although believers should be intentional about their Christian education and spiritual growth, it is paramount that believers recognize their inability to know everything about God and God's ways. God is incomprehensible. However, God loves people enough to reveal Godself to people through God's word and conversation.⁹ One sure way a Christian can measure his or her growth is if they have learned how to discern, trust, and fully obey the voice of God.

Practical Theology: Christian Ethics

Merriam Webster defines the word ethic as a set of moral principles that serve as a guiding philosophy to daily behavior and tasks.¹⁰ Previous theologians stated that Christian theology and Christian ethics have blurring boundaries that overlap, influence, and drive Christian leaders. One should understand this statement as Christian leaders will normally have hermeneutical insight—insight influenced by their learned morals and

⁹ Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian*, 38.

¹⁰ "Ethic," Merriam-Webster.com, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethic>.

values.¹¹ These morals and values may have a foundational footing from the Bible, childhood rearing, educational opportunities, and personal experiences. Although moral reasoning may heavily influence a Christian leader's ethical practice, sometimes that which is said during teaching and preaching moments can be far from their hearts.

Christian ethics allow for persons to evaluate how they understand themselves to be in the light of their faith and their commitment to adhere to what they know to be biblically and morally right as Christians.¹² For many years, the researcher heard Christian leaders urge church goers to always use scripture as their guide when they faced making life-changing decisions. For the most part, the researcher also felt that the scriptures were the primary way for believers to hear from God. However, with the spiritual growth of the researcher, she determined that one's access to God's written Word does not limited God's voice. In addition, the Word of God can be fallible if the interpreter is unable to interpret it using its historical and theological context. When genuine theological interpretation happens, one derives both meaning and truth from the Word of God more so than moral reasoning.

Christians have an ethical obligation to seek God daily through prayer, meditation on God's Word that should be found within their hearts, and intimate time spent with God. If Christians uphold these daily tasks, their actions will reflect their understanding of God's voice and characteristics. One should not mistake God's voice and characteristics for religion and traditions. Ethical theology exercises concise decisions

¹¹ Peter Crafts Hodgson and Robert Harlen King, eds., *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks* (London, UK: SPCK, 2008), 38.

¹² Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, eds., *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London, UK: Continuum, 2011), 26.

that will promote spiritual growth while extending liberation to congregants who participate in religious practice and traditions of their place of worship. Next, scripture served in an authoritative role of Christian theology, the church, and some Christian traditions in Christian churches.¹³

For example, scripture records the birth and death of Jesus Christ, and when one contextually analyzes, one can understand the dates of the texts without assumptions. Next, throughout the Bible, one finds scriptures that warn against pagan celebrations due to traditions (Mk. 7:13, 2 Thess. 2:15, Jer. 10:14). Although Christians set aside Christmas and Easter to celebrate Christ, one must still consider the question of is it ethical for Christians to partake in them. With both holidays, a lot of time and effort go into decorations that typically consist of graven images that depict the birth or dying of Christ. This is not to insinuate that Christians should reconsider celebrating Christ. However, Christians should consider the ethical nature of their motives.

Lastly, after ethical consideration of questions such as listed above, one should arrive at what most Christians refer to as moments of epiphany or revelation. Hodgson and Harlen state that revelation has served as the epistemological basis for theology; that is, an appeal often has been made to revelation in order to account for knowledge of God.¹⁴ Christians should hold themselves accountable on an individual level by learning about why they partake in traditional tasks, believe in certain theologies, and why the Holy Bible should be foundational to any additional religious readings.

¹³ Hodgson and King, *Christian Theology*, 63.

¹⁴ Hodgson and King, *Christian Theology*, 114.

Systematic Theology: Science and Religion

The topic of science versus religion has echoed for as long as the researcher remembers. Questions such as, is science or religion right, should society allow their union with understood roles in history, and should Christians remain ambivalent to the role of science during God's creation of earth? Science and religion have been at odds ever since science began to exist as a formal discipline in sixteenth-century Europe.¹⁵ From the researcher's previous conversations with some Christians, they feel that The Big Bang Theory discredits the capabilities of God and therefore secular classroom settings for young learners should not present it.

According to Jerry Coyne, science is a set of tools refined over hundreds of years for getting answers about nature and one can consider it a method for understanding how the universe works.¹⁶ The field of science is interesting to say the least. However, the more information presented about the topic of science, the more Christians reject the theology about it.¹⁷ Science credits nature, man, and evolution with the world being as it is today. On the other hand, religious theology inserts God as the Creator and sustainer of the world as it is today. So, which belief is right and factual? In order to answer this question, one must determine and explain why they hold scientific or religious beliefs.

When believers take religious beliefs or follow them out of context, believers tend to reject science altogether. Therefore, they set themselves up to miss how God can work through science. For example, scripture states: "Worship the LORD your God, and His

¹⁵ Jerry A. Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 1.

¹⁶ Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact*, 28.

¹⁷ Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact*, 60.

blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you” (Ex. 23:25, NIV). From a religious perspective, God is saying that if you worship God, God will give blessings and will take sickness away. However, the text does not say how God would take the sickness away. Depending on the identity of the illness, one can have various options (medications, therapy, exercising, specific treatments, etc.) for having the sickness removed. Churchgoers and religious partakers typically take on the views and opinions of their leaders who bear the responsibility for teaching and preaching. Therefore, exegetical ability is imperative.

Religious and Christian theology can create space and a narrative for how one responds to scientific approaches around maintaining the body and mind. Although God specifically speaks in scripture about healing and being the source of healing, God never limits God’s ability to use human vessels in scripture. When giving more critical thought to the aforementioned statement, in order for believers to achieve a certain level of spiritual growth, believers must understand that the God at the center of their beliefs cannot be placed in a box. Part of this means that believers cannot make God physically show Godself in order for believers to believe that God is responsible for supernatural occurrences. Another indicator of one’s spiritual growth is one’s ability to embrace scientific and medical theories that God has allowed doctors and practitioners to research and implement resources for better wholistic health.

Although science and religion do not exist in harmony, both should be fully embraced in order for one to learn how the voice of God impacts the human mind and one’s spirituality.¹⁸ When embracing religious traditions and tasks, believers often refuse

¹⁸ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 29.

to deviate from, advance, or go outside of what they have come to know about Christianity and their denominations. On the other hand, scientific knowledge is often transitory. Therefore, sometimes science becomes obsolete or debunked by new findings. Jerry Coyne identifies this as a strength because new scientific findings correct any previous erroneous information and permits growth.¹⁹

Systematic Theology: Process Theology

In 1929, a then math professor by the name of Alfred North Whitehead, wrote an essay entitled “Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology.” This essay sought to provide a rationale of why a process theology that allows for interdependence, dynamic actualization, and creativity among living organisms was the best way to harmonize an experience.²⁰ As mentioned previously regarding science and religion, Whitehead also discussed how the field of science is ever-changing. Therefore, persons needed to implement new ideas and processes to fit then-current philosophical theology. Whitehead’s theology also focuses on how life’s experiences, time, space, and people all interdepend upon each other.²¹

Process theology can be confusing, hard to navigate, and some Christian theologians do not receive it well. Bruce G. Epperly defined process theology by stating that it “describes the dynamic interplay of permanence and flux, evident in the universe

¹⁹ Coyne, *Faith Versus Fact*, 28.

²⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Free Press, 1985).

²¹ Robert Karl Gnuse, *The Old Testament and Process Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 28.

and our own lives.”²² Therefore, that which believers view as unchanging (i.e. meaning of scripture, the mind of God, God’s authoritative position, etc.) can change in order for growth to occur. The growth that is mentioned should occur within the theological, spiritual, and emotional aspects of the believer. As the researcher on her childhood rearing’s concerning God, she can remember her mother and others referencing God as one to be feared, and referencing the pastor as being the symbolic presence. Therefore, they expected others to hold the pastor in high honor similarly to God.

The aforementioned rearing that the researcher received while growing up does not support one of the primary ideas of process theology: God is relational and desires for persons to make decisions about their relationships with God.²³ This is not to say that God is not a God of authority or sovereign power. God continues to be in control but will not force persons into a relationship with God. Next, process theology emphasizes that God does not act alone. God used Jesus Christ as a divine humanly presence on earth, the Holy Spirit as a continuous guidance for believers, and God uses the everyday common human being as a vessel for various tasks within the physical sphere.

“God’s divine-human partnership with humankind challenges persons to think critically about the context of John 3:16, and ask if God really intends to give up on and fully destroy God’s creation (the world) one day if God really loved it enough to sacrifice the life of Christ for it?”²⁴ Process theology attempts to project the “future as challenging, but open, and shaped, to some degree, by our personal and corporate actions, rather than

²² Bruce Gordon Epperly, *Process Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2013), 8.

²³ Epperly, *Process Theology*, 6.

²⁴ Epperly, *Process Theology*, 6.

being fated for destruction by an arbitrary divine decision.”²⁵ This is one aspect of process theology that brings about a problem for theologians who firmly believe in the second coming of Christ as outlined in scripture.

Since process theology can be subjective, it can require Christian theologians to dig deeper and become more diligent in their research concerning controversial scriptural topics. In no way does this mean that scripture could be subjective. However, exegetical efforts should reflect historical facts that allows persons to arrive at impactful theological views. When considering process theology, one should avoid theological views that assert God as being absolute. As mentioned previously, process theology deems God as being relational and this means that God is willing to be interchangeable according to where believers are in their relationships with God.²⁶

Not only is God interchangeable in God's communal relationship with humankind, God is also liberating and temporal. God has shown God's untiring love for humankind by offering Jesus Christ as a ransom for humankind's sin debt. However, God has given humankind the choice to accept or reject the sacrifice that Christ made. Although God's liberation gives way to one's own decision, persons must also take notice of God's temporal stance with humankind being stagnant in time. God's desire is to see God's creations flourish, be gregarious, and learn how to become spiritually wealthy. What stops God from giving up?²⁷ The answer is very simple: God loves humankind too much.

²⁵ Epperly, *Process Theology*, 7.

²⁶ Epperly, *Process Theology*, 4.

²⁷ Epperly, *Process Theology*, 5.

Conclusion

Hearing the voice of God can become as normal as hearing verbalized communication coming from other humans. However, one's willingness to feed their spiritual nature determines one's ability to do so. As mentioned before, recipients greatly determine their spiritual growth by engaging Christian education, ethical practice, moral theology, and other theologies. For some, the voice of God can be still and quiet, but for others, God's voice may be a little louder if their spiritual ears are not accustomed to hearing God's voice.

As the researcher reflects on how God made God's voice clear in her life, it leads her to the time that God revealed Godself to her at the age of nineteen. During that time, she knew who God was and the purpose of Jesus Christ. however, she did not understand God's ability to speak directly to her. This understanding did not come until she started attending Sunday School and Bible studies at her church.

In addition, the researcher had a hunger to know more about God talking and interacting with born-again believers. Upon hearing a voice say, "remember your promise that you were not going to smoke again...", the researcher immediately assumed that she heard the voice of God. At that time, she was right about whose voice she heard but she did not have sufficient spiritual maturity to know why God was speaking to her at that time. In addition, this convicted her but she remained hesitant about never smoking drugs again.

True spiritual growth goes beyond knowing when one hears the voice of God. Hearing voices in one's mind is not uncommon. However, being able to determine the

source behind the voice can be challenging. When considering the voices that can be heard mentally, believers must learn the difference between their voice, God's voice, Satan's voice, and other internal stimuli. Sound theology can enhance believers' spiritual discernment, while faulty theology can lead believers down a path that causes them to become confused about what they should believe and what they should reject.

Christian theology should always have a foundation rooted from the Word of God. This is not to say that one should limit theology to the scriptures. However, Christians should desire to follow after those who affirm their belief in the virgin birth, who identify Christ as the Son of God, and who accept the resurrection of Christ. In doing so, believers will have a better chance at applying practical theories to their everyday lives as they grow spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

Theologies that promote self-awareness, liberation, life principles to live by, and so much more currently riddle the world. All of the aforementioned things are good areas of focus, but they can lead to a life without Christ as the focal point. In order for Christians to find the balance that they need in their lives, they must faithfully become diligent about Christian education.

Christians should incorporate Christian education in their homes, churches, communities, and schools. In the home setting, Christian education can occur with family Bible studies or simply reading Bible verses as a family. With Bible-based learning happening in the homes of Christians, believers can learn how to grow spiritually as a family. Growing spiritually as a family does not mean that individual spiritual growth is not required, but it places God at the center of the family.

Most churches instituted the practice of holding mid-week Bible studies to give congregants the opportunity to learn more about the Word of God in a more formal setting. One should not mistake these mid-week Bible studies as a substitute for individual time that should be given studying the Word of God. While God is not limited to solely speaking to the believer via scriptures, believers rely heavily on finding the answers to their questions in them. In searching for answers in the scriptures, most Christians identify situations or circumstances in the Bible that can related to what it is that they experience. Although that is a good step to take when trying to know what God has to say about their situations, believers must remain on the side of not thinking that God will resolve their situations exactly as the accounts in the Bible.

Next, one should not place science and religion in a realm that will prevent born-again believers from embracing the idea that God is the Creator of all things. However, God has used nature and other resources to carry out God's divine assignments. As mentioned by Yonghua Ge,

Creation is not a change. Any change must presume some substrate that undergoes the change, but creation is from nothing and is thus not a change. What is evolution? To evolve is to change, and so evolution is essentially a change. This means that creation and evolution are not the same kind of thing, nor are they in the same category. As we know, only things of the same kind and in the same category can be contrary to each other. For instance, a square is contrary to a triangle, because a two-dimensional figure cannot be both square and triangular. However, something can be both square and red, because they are different types of things. This means that being square and being red cannot be directly contrary to each other. They cannot be diametrically opposed. Likewise, creation and evolution cannot be in direct opposition, since they are different types of things. For this reason, it is simply a logical mistake to pitch evolution directly against creation and vice versa. They both can be true at the same time. As such, atheists

cannot discredit the doctrine of creation on the basis of evolution, nor do Christians need to overthrow evolution to defend creation.²⁸

The above-mentioned statements cause a question to come to mind: when considering creation versus evolution, have Christians compared apples to oranges? Yonghua is in essence suggesting that persons stop comparing the two and start identifying how the differences between the two can work hand-in-hand. In order for this to happen, Christians should be open to fully learning about the evolving area of science and understand that new revelations will not discredit previously learned information. New revelations in science typically seek to continue making things better in order to prevent the extinction of certain subject matters and to acknowledge previous errors.

As with science and theology, process theology also seeks to encourage ongoing conversations about previously learned information. Process theology does not limit this learned information to scriptures but includes every aspect of Christian religious practices, thoughts, and theology. If one takes a look at Christianity as a whole, one can see how it has evolved based on denominations. As a partaker of the Baptist denomination, the researcher remembers when churches did not accept women or allow them to preach in the pulpit. Although most Baptist churches have made progress towards allowing an equal gift-sharing platform for women and men, some people still struggle with this concept on an individual level. These struggles identify why process theology can be essential to one's growth spiritually and mentally.

²⁸ Yonghua Ge, "Can We Defend the Doctrine of Creation Today? Aquinas on Creation and Its Implications for Modern Science-Religion Dialogue," *Crux* 52, no. 2 (2016): 16-17, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAn4148417&site=ehost-live>.

Process theology centers around the liberation of thinking, dialoguing, and theorizing. The church plays a vital part in influencing believers on specific thought processes on certain topics; however, informal settings and conversations are equally important. So, how does one get people to engage in meaningful conversations that will bring a more liberated aspect to their thinking and day-to-day dealing with others? The answer lies within one's ability to identify that one's thinking may be faulty or does not allow an avenue for others to grow in grace.

Foundational to Christianity is Jesus Christ being born, dying on the cross, and being resurrected so sinners could have their sins pardoned. It appears that Christians can sometimes be the least likely ones to show forgiveness or grace. At times, the church's Sunday morning messages are harsh, unwelcoming, and promote reasons why churches should not accept others due to their sins. This is not to suggest that churches embrace the sins of others, but actions towards others should reflect the fact that all have sinned. Since all sin, believers and unbelievers, believers should seek to share theological views that convict but also cover each other in love.

One should not assume it to be a weakness to cover others in love and one should not assume covering others in love means acceptance of sin. One should understand the covering of others as an attempt empathize with other fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. In addition, showing the love of Christ during trying times is an indicator of one who heard the voice of God. When taking in religious thoughts or theology, consulting with God for guidance as to the information that believers should retain or ignore is vital in having a thought process that will be inviting to others. Lastly, one thing every

Christian should bear in mind is that Christianity is not just for Christians if Christians want to see God's kingdom grow spiritually beyond current believers.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The interdisciplinary chapter focuses on three disciplines, social work, psychology and psychiatric. These disciplines are not primarily connected to the church, scriptural findings, or the ministry of Christ. They do however relate directly to those who experience hearing voices. In addition, the three mentioned disciplines are responsible for helping people identify which voice or voices that may be hearing. Every person that is mentally healthy should have a conscience to help lead them when they are considering what is right and what is wrong.

In today's society, professionals diagnose an increasing number of persons with mental health disorders and conditions. This increase in diagnoses does not suggest that mental health disorders are new. The evolving field of science has afforded more research about human behavior, genetics, and the development of the human brain.

Learning how to discern, trust, and obey the spiritual voice of God correlates with one's mental health. Having a healthy mental state of mind encourages and promotes liberation of faith to discern if the voice that one hears is, in fact, the voice of God. One needs to know how to address the unidentified voices is necessary if one desires to maintain their mental health when the voice that one hears does not belong to God or self. Just as one's ability to know the voice of God determines one's spiritual growth, knowing the voice that one hears determines one's emotional and mental growth. Some mental

health disorders such as Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder have identified symptoms of audio hallucinations, and those affected can hear anywhere from one voice to a crowd of voices in their minds. Nicholas Cummings points out that one should not confuse mental illness with thought processes that are not as happy as one would desire for them to be.¹

The field of mental health has a wide variety of disciplines that serve as lifelines to those who need assistance with living a normal life while coping with mental health disorders. Those that suffer from mental health disorders can find help through therapy in outpatient clinics, acute inpatient hospitalization, private therapists, teletherapy in their homes, or prescribed psychotropic medications. The option that best suits the individuals requiring help relies heavily on their access to behavioral health and prescription insurance. The Affordable Healthcare Act opened up an avenue for many to seek mental health services because the law required most states to offer behavioral health and psychotropic insurance that would allow people the chance to seek help. Although made available, the option of paid mental health services through a benefit from the provided insurance coverage requires a qualifying diagnosis and ICD Ten code from the DSM V.

So, what is the role of the church concerning mental health? Peter Singer states that:

Emotional and behavioral concerns, now often referred to as mental health needs, have existed since the beginning of recorded history. In multiple passages, the Bible indicates a relationship, though not always direct causality, between sin and emotional/ behavioral concerns, even if the sin is on the part of someone other than the person bearing the consequence of the sin. Seeing this connection, most of Christianity either addressed emotional/ behavioral concerns within the Church or severed connection with the person. While this proved adequate for some, others were not sufficiently helped.

¹ Nicholas A. Cummings and Rogers Wright, *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm* (London, UK: Routledge, 2015).

As society moved away from a more Christian-centered perspective, recognition grew that many needs were not being met. Psychology and related mental health fields emerged, partially in response to this unmet need. As they did so, Sigmund Freud's militant atheism, as well as approaches such as strict behaviorism and exclusively cognitive or biological views of human behavior and existence, contributed to deep divides, mistrust, and hostility between the mental health field and the Church.

As the twentieth century unfolded, views gradually changed within both communities. Maslow introduced a hierarchy of needs that recognized spirituality as a central piece of a person's being. Mental health service delivery decentralized, and the emergence of community-based interventions drastically increased the contact the Church had with individuals with emotional/behavioral or mental health needs. As the faith community and mental health system learned more accurate information about each other, they developed a growing awareness of the need to collaborate.

Reservations remain, and systems for referral and collaboration are still lacking, but most faith leaders and mental health providers now accept the need and benefit of collaboration.²

Necessary bridges that can connect the church with the care of the mental health field include open communication, education, and research. In the past, churchgoers relied on lay leaders to help them to navigate through the challenges of life. While this is positive, many lay persons lack the proper training from a scientific perspective to effectively help those who are suffering with mental health issues. Also, the growing Christian church has shown more receptiveness to theories of using therapy and medications to help combat psychotic behaviors that stem from mental health diagnoses. Every lay person, pastor, and associate leader should have some formal education around counseling and mental health.

² Peter Louis Singer, "Coordinating Pastoral Care of Survivors with Mental Health Providers," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 45, no. 3 (July 2018): 31-32, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAI58180709000333&site=ehost-live>.

Over time, the mental health field evolved from just including psychologists and psychiatrists to including other disciplines such as social workers (clinical and licensed levels), nurse practitioners, and licensed professional counselors. The above-mentioned disciplines provide counseling and diagnoses in order to start interventions that will promote healthy mental wellness. In order to properly deal with the overall mental health of patients, mental health providers now focus on clinical therapy and medication compliance. In doing so, those receiving treatment have the ability to use medication to maintain a chemical balance in the brain and learned clinical interventions to address unhealthy behaviors and decisions that induce stressful lifestyles.

This interdisciplinary foundation chapter explores how the disciplines of social work, psychology, and psychiatry promote and encourage clients to create a meaningful life that will sustain their mental, emotional, and spiritual health. In doing so, this chapter comes to a conclusion as to how the field of mental health directly correlates to one being able to discern when one hears the voice of God and unhealthy voices that directly result from unhealthy mental cognitions.

Social Work Discipline

The field of social work had its humble beginnings during the Industrial Revolution that originated in Great Britain in during the 1830's.³ Although the country of Britain advanced from field labor, country living, and evolved to city-based living, it began facing social, economic, epidemics, and child labor related calamities.⁴ Most of the

³ John Pierson, *Understanding Social Work: History and Context* (Berkshire, OH: McGraw Hill, 2012).

⁴ Pierson, *Understanding Social Work*, 6.

citizens were not properly trained on how to use industrialized machinery, many died from job related accidents. Next, children were also brought into the industrialized factories for cheap hire and they too lost their lives in machine related accidents.

In addition, to the rising deaths, poor sanitary conditions in the newly established factories created health related epidemics prompting mothers to remain home with famished children. With working mothers and children now at home, household incomes were impacted. Due to impacted health from working long hours or dying in factories, fathers were not able to financially sustain their families; therefore, the welfare system was implemented. Due to this implementation, the social work profession was birth. At this time, social workers were responsible for going into the homes of single-mothers, completing walk-throughs, and ensuring that no abled body adult males were living in the homes of the welfare recipients.⁵

During the early start of the profession, social workers had little to no education; however, they had a heart and passion for people. Social workers were advocates and a bridge for the vulnerable and those at risk in society. Being a bridge meant that social workers were able to connect those in need to the resources that they so desperately needed. As time has gone on, social workers are now required to obtain a set of skills and education as outlined by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) by accredited universities and schools of social work throughout the United States.

Social workers are required to obtain at least a four-year degree and this degree must include field placement in an area that will allow them to get hands on experience before completing their degree. After obtaining a four-year degree, a social worker can

⁵ Pierson, *Understanding Social Work*, 7.

begin working in the field as a case manager or discharge planner; however, at this level, one can expect to make roughly under thirty thousand dollars a year. In order to see a significant increase in income, a bachelor level social worker must complete another one and a half to three additional schooling at the graduate level. In addition, social workers have the option of becoming licensed to practice at the Bachelor, Master's, or independent levels. A licensed master level social worker will be able to provide services while their employer is reimbursed by insurance companies and governments; however, an independent level social worker will be able to obtain a National Provider Identification (NPI) and be directly paid for their services.

Although social workers are still advocating for those at risk, the profession has moved passed conducting house visits. Social workers are now heavily involved with the mental health field as case managers, discharge planners, psychoeducation providers, and therapists. As therapists, social workers are able to empower clients to remain true to who they are while learning about the importance of medication compliance, the impact therapy can have, and encouraging them to rely on a spiritual authority. Social workers are able to spend time during their one-on-one interactions with patients learning about their cultural and spiritual beliefs. In doing so, clients are more likely to build rapport and trust in a therapeutic manner.

Unlike psychologists and psychiatrists, social workers are unable to prescribe medications to patients; however, of the three disciplines, social workers are more hands on with providing external interventions. These external interventions include but are not limited to, healthy coping strategies, anger management skills, effective communication techniques, identifying trauma related triggers, and so on. Social workers have a core

foundation around meeting clients where they are and not trying to move them into a space that will fit others or society.

When addressing mental health issues, getting to the “why” behind the issue will be prioritized over addressing the symptoms of the mental health issue. Not only do social workers provide mental health care to the impacted patient, they are also intentional about including the entire ecological system that surrounds the patient. Before social workers begin the task of implementing interventions for patients, they spend a great deal of time engaging and assessing the patient to determine the true underlying diagnosis and interventions that will best fit the patient’s situation.

Next, because licensed social workers are required to continue ongoing clinical learning throughout their career, they are able to use the most current evidenced based practice interventions that have been tested and proved to be reliable by other practitioners. Being able to use the most current and reliable clinical interventions gives social workers a chance to further prove that they are credible; therefore, clients are more likely to trust their insights about treating specific diagnoses. Building rapport and trust with clients is very important in the field of social work as this field is the most hands on in a wholistic way.

The field of social work is not directly connected to the field of psychology; however, social workers use and depend on psychological testing and evaluation techniques to determine the efficacy of their clinical interventions.⁶ These testing instruments will determine if the social worker should continue working with the patient, terminate the clinical relationship, or refer to another practitioner. When a social worker

⁶ Sonia G. Austrian, *Mental Disorders, Medications, and Clinical Social Work* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012), 231.

has successfully treated a patient, that patient will be fully informed about the state of their mental health, how to prevent a mental health crisis, and what to do in the event they suffer a mental health crisis.

One advantage of someone being clinically treated by a social worker is the fact that the treating social worker will have direct access to other resources that the client may need in order to live a healthy and meaningful life. Most persons who are living with mental health diagnoses are unable to maintain a home, job, or other necessities if they do not have support from family and friends. Having support from family and friends can come in the form of them administering psychotropic medications on time, assistance with monthly budgeting, encouraging them to verbalize their feelings, and help them to identify possible life stressors that may cause them a mental health crisis.

Psychology Discipline

The field of psychology has been well respected by all disciplines associated with the work of mental health diagnosing and treatment. The word psychology is derived from two Greek words, they are, *psuche* or *psyche* and *logos*.⁷ In 1653, James De Back first used the word in his treatise on the heart.⁸ The field of psychology's initial purpose was to observe and study persons in their social environment for research purposes. The findings were then discussed by multiple psychologists to determine the scientific associations of human behavior. In addition, earlier psychologists wanted to study and

⁷ Donald K. Freedheim, ed., *History of Psychology*, 2nd ed., Handbook of Psychology, vol. 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013).

⁸ Freedheim, *History of Psychology*.

research how the human brain was directly responsible for how people reacted in situations that brought about stress.

Just as the field of social work, psychology has advanced and grown past one way of researching, assessing, and observing human behavior. This advancement has opened up the field of psychology in a way that allows for the discipline to help clients in their homes, communities, or outpatient centers. In doing so, psychologists are able to work with clients over an extended period of time in various capacities. Psychologists have numerous roles and focal areas that they specialize in today and some include but are not limited to, forensic, school, counseling, assessing, educational, community, and health. In considering psychologists from the stand point of one being able to discern which voice they are hearing, the area of assessing, diagnosing and counseling should be considered.

Psychologists must receive formal education, field training, and become licensed if they desire to practice at an independent level. The American Board of Psychology is responsible for putting guidelines in place for psychologists to become certified in an area of expertise. These guidelines are needed in order to inform those who are receiving the psychological services about the specialized training and ongoing education that the practitioner has received. Also, psychologists are required to have a profound understanding of statistics and data measuring tools so they can successfully complete their research work and be able to evaluate the effectiveness of the work that is done with their patients in the field.

Of the three disciplines that are being explored, psychology is the discipline that is directly intertwined with pastoral care and pastoral counseling. As identified by Browning-Helsel, ministers “can serve as listeners of and witnesses to the voices of

persons who are relegated to the fringes of society.”⁹ Clergy leaders are influential in the life of the believers who make up their congregations; therefore, they can be instrumental in leading congregants to get needed clinical assessing and help. In addition, clergy leaders can help or hinder medication compliance for those who attend church services regularly and have been prescribed medication for mental illnesses.

Psychologists who are certified to practice at the independent level can be beneficial to the communities in which they practice by training local pastors how to assess congregants in a healthy manner. With the appropriate training, clergy leaders will know their limitations while providing pastoral counseling, when to make a referral to a licensed professional, and when they should contact the local police in order to keep someone safe. Most parishioners view their clergy leaders as being direct representatives of God; however, because they are not God and some are not clinically trained, clergy leaders can sometimes ill advise or miss important details that may determine the level of mental health services one needs.

Next, the field of psychology has a leading role in diagnosing patients based on criteria defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental Disorders (DSM-V). The DSM V is the national tool that is used to assign a billable code for insurance coverage and gives clear examples of the symptoms that are typically present when one is experiencing a specific disorder. Once a diagnosis is identified, psychologists are then tasked with making treatment recommendations for the patient to live a life as normal as possible.

⁹ Ryan Lamothe, “Pastoral Power beyond Psychology’s Marginalization: Resisting the Discourses of the Psy-Complex,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 26, no. 3 (2016): 221, accessed November 3, 2018, doi:10.1080/10649867.2017.1296661.

Psychologists make treatment recommendations or administer treatment for mental health diagnoses in hopes of modifying behaviors that are a threat to the client or those who come in contact with the client. According to Andrew Colman, “methods of behavior modification are based on the fundamental assumptions that most mental disorders can be interpreted as maladaptive patterns of behavior, that these patterns result from learning processes, and that the appropriate treatment involves the unlearning of these behavior patterns in therapy.”¹⁰

Psychiatry Discipline

The field of psychiatry can be respected as the foundation to diagnosing and treating illnesses within the human brain. Of the three discussed disciplines, psychiatry is the only discipline requiring one to be an actual medical doctor with a specialized focus on the human brain and its functions. It was during the eighteenth century that the field of medicine and the federal government began to separately focus on mental illnesses across all social classes.¹¹ Since the field of psychiatry was in its infancy stages, physicians began to explore what could be done to address “mad-man” like behaviors that were being shown by those experiencing mental illness.

Psychiatrists were among the first to use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) to properly diagnosis and study the behavioral patterns of patients who were not mentally able to function in society from day-to-day. One of the initial noted professors of mental therapy, J. C. A. Heinroth, has been credited for writing

¹⁰ Andrew M. Colman, *What Is Psychology?* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), 177.

¹¹ Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

a two-volume psychiatric text, *History and Critique of the Mysticism of All Known People and Times*, and a two-volume text on mental health, *Instruction in Appropriate Self-treatment in the Early Stages of Mental Diseases*, as guides for training physicians across the Psychiatric discipline.¹² Both of these texts were able to identify notable connections of mental health and its associations with early civilization, poverty, and classism.

In addition to the aforementioned connections with mental health, Heinroth was also able to identify the absence of true theory that would allow for wholistic remedies to address human behavior when the brain was experiencing an illness that impacted one's behavior.¹³ Although Heinroth made great strides with his efforts of providing clinically sound knowledge on mental health, "not everyone agreed with the new scientific medical findings".¹⁴

Another noted scholar by the name of J.M. Leupoldt composed several writings that suggested Heinroth was relying on antiquated findings and leaning on his own contemporary opinions formulated about others. Leupoldt firmly believed that medical remedies and its history should hold both the history of health and disease and a subjective side (the physician's knowledge, practice, their literature, institutions, and lives.)¹⁵ History is very important when one is researching or exploring possible solutions to current problems; therefore, Leupoldt was suggesting that any evidenced based recommendations should hold a psychiatric foundation that could be traced back to the

¹² Micale and Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, 41.

¹³ Micale and Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, 41.

¹⁴ Micale and Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, 45.

¹⁵ Micale and Porter, *Discovering the History of Psychiatry*, 45.

historical facts that defined mental illness. In obtaining such factual findings, practitioners would be able to better serve persons suffering from mental illness.

Based on previous knowledge, some of the historical findings on mental illness came about through controlled research experiences on human subjects. These human subject experiences gave inspiration to noted physicians around the world and numerous hypothesized essays were written. Although scientific and evidenced based findings came about from the human based research projects, the field of social work began to question if the human subjects were being treated with dignity while being observed and researched. As cited by McHugh and Slavney and mentioned by Mayer-Gross, Slater and Roth, a fundamental skill that every good psychiatrist must have is the ability to “gather a comprehensive body of information on every patient from history, mental state, physical examination, and laboratory studies.”¹⁶

The field of psychiatry has evolved based on the above-mentioned factors; however, some loopholes are present that prevent mentally ill patients from receiving much needed psychiatric help. Although psychiatric services and treatments are covered under most insurance plans, some consumers opt not to purchase the coverage due to high payment requirements. In addition, those who may be homeless or stricken by poverty are more likely to have a mental health diagnosis that requires ongoing medication management and therapy. As of 2019, psychiatrists and medical doctors are the only ones authorized in the United States to prescribe psychotropic medications; therefore, behavioral insurance is necessary to cover the costs of an office visit and medications.

¹⁶ Paul R. McHugh and Phillip R. Slavney, *The Perspectives of Psychiatry*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 338.

When mental illnesses are left untreated due to financial limitations, those who are affected are left going through life until they have a psychotic episode. Psychotic episodes come with pros and cons for the individuals experiencing them. To begin, psychotic episodes can cause local law enforcement to get involved if the person is suicidal, homicidal, or displaying behaviors that could potentially become unsafe. When law enforcement becomes involved, psychiatric evaluation from a psychiatrist in a state-run institution is almost imminent; therefore, an uninsured individual would benefit from such course of actions.

Next, uninsured individuals who are admitted to a state sanctioned mental institution on emergency placement will be given the opportunity to have access to needed medications, housing resources, counseling, and other needed services at no cost to them. Although psychiatrists are responsible for assessing, writing a treatment plan, and prescribing medications for those suffering from mental illness, they are also responsible for helping identify and authorizing services for the patient.

Conclusion

Although this section has focused on three disciplines that are not primarily connected to the church, scriptural findings, or the ministry of Christ, they do however relate directly to those who experience hearing voices. In addition, the three mentioned disciplines are responsible for helping people identify which voice or voices that may be hearing. Every person that is mentally healthy should have a conscience to help lead them when they are considering what is right and what is wrong.

As defined by Merriam-Webster, the conscience provides a “sense of the moral goodness or blameworthiness of one’s own conduct, intentions, or character together with a feeling of obligation to do right or be good.”¹⁷ Having a conscience can be considered as one’s natural ability to mentally hear a voice telling them when something is not right with actions that are about to be committed. So, what is the difference between one’s conscience and the voice of God or is there really a difference? It is my belief that one’s conscience and the voice of God can over time become one. This unified connection occurs when one spends time reading the Word of God, meditating on the Word of God often, and not giving in to fleshly desires.

The Contemporary English Version of Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created humans to be like himself; he made men and women” (Gen. 1:27, CEV). Since God is the creator, God created humankind to have the same ability to be led by supernatural powers. Marilyn J. Legge states that,

Protestant traditions teach that humans are created free, and thus also are capable of flawed and destructive choices, and that humans are awesomely saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, these colossal Christian theological claims swoop back to the first and second creation narratives in Genesis 12²—about humans being created in the image and likeness of God to have “dominion over the earth,” about God creating humans male and female, and about God seeing everything made as very good. This early Christian belief of being created in the image of God announces the vocation of being human in God’s good creation and orients theological anthropology. As such, Christians are called to be related to what God creates, loves, and redeems through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This ancient phrase—helps US to plumb the depths of what it means to be human in relationship to God through Christ and how do we live in openness to God’s continuing creative work? Some feminist Christians declare that to be human is to be co-creating in Jesus’ Way.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Conscience,” accessed April 01, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conscience>.

¹⁸ Marilyn J. Legge, “On Being Created Human in The Image of God: Christian Feminist Voices,” *Touchstone* 34, no. 1 (February 2016): 33, accessed November 11, 2018, <https://web-a-ebcsohost.com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=15&sid=b0860c9c-0a2a-4d0a-89b6-63aeb9e4f0ab@sessionmgr4007>.

Legge is suggesting that the same freedom that is given to every Christian and unbeliever can be the very thing that causes our flawed decisions. Being created in the image of God does not mean that we will automatically take on the love, posture, and goodwill of God at birth; therefore, as born-again Christians, we must do the physical tasks that will cause us to take on the spiritual characteristics of God. Fully taking on spiritual characteristics of God takes years of growth and this growing will not occur if one does not know how to follow the voice of God.

Social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists all play a different role when helping patients learn how to protect their mental health from voices that could lead to erroneous behaviors. One mental health disorder that consists of patient's hearing voices is schizophrenia. As defined by the DSM-V, schizophrenia is a severe and chronic mental disorder characterized by disturbances in thought, perception and behavior.¹⁹ Through one of five sub-groups, patients are diagnosed based on presenting symptoms and three symptoms that must be present are, delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized speech.²⁰

The three required symptoms for the diagnosis of schizophrenia can be a direct result of one having multiple internal stimuli or voices occupying their mental attention. These internal voices or stimuli is not the voice of the person; therefore, one can safely say that they heard voices are not directly associated with the voice of God. The previous statement is not to say that persons suffering from schizophrenia cannot get to a point of having the voice of God present in their life; however, one will need to have their

¹⁹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

²⁰ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

physical mind treated in order for them to grow in a spiritual manner. When preaching or teaching the Word of God, messengers must be mindful that a congregant will not be able to grasp what is being said if the physical mind is not in a healthy state.

Furthermore, as proclaimers of the gospel, one must be just as passionate as social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists about the mental health of those we preach Christ to on a weekly basis. This passion can come in the form of formal education about mental illnesses, spiritual growth that is indicated by fine tuning their spiritual hear to the voice of God and standing on the shoulders of professionals who are knowledgeable in the mental health area. Learning to discern, obey and trust the voice of God also requires us to learn when other voices are occupying our minds. These other voices that that referenced are not limited to the voice of Satan; therefore, one should invest time in learning if and when having mental dialogue with oneself or if one is dealing with a mental illness.

Lastly, it is important to reflect on the words of Marilyn Legge from her poem “Made in the Image of God,”

...Yet evil does not ---cannot--- undermine or overcome the love of God. God forgives, and calls all of us to confess our fears and failings with honesty and humility. God reconciles, and calls us to repent the part we have played in damaging our world, ourselves, and each other. God transforms, and calls us to protect the vulnerable, to pray for deliverance from evil, to work with God for the healing of the world, that all might have abundant life. We sing of grace.²¹

This love that Legge speaks of can only come from God Himself and a full understanding of it requires one to tarry in prayer and conversations with Him. As mentioned before, it is through prayers and conversations with God that spiritual ears mature and internal voices are guided by His spiritual voice once spoken. One should talk to God enough

²¹ Legge, “On Being Created Human in The Image of God,” 39.

until the internal voice is no more and His voice is the only internal and mental voice that we hear. God's voice not only leads and guides, it should also push an individual towards a spiritual conviction that arrests one when thinking about or attempting to do wrong.

When a spiritual arrest occurs, repentance should come next with a changed heart and actions. In doing these mentioned things, one will ultimately do just as Legge has determined, that is, become the true image of God.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the fall of 2019, movie director and screenwriter, Kasi Lemmons graced the world with her biopic view of the life of American abolitionist Harriet Tubman. In this suspenseful biopic, Lemmons takes viewers back to the year 1849 in Maryland when the slave trade was turbulent in the North because numerous slaves were escaping from the South with hopes of gaining their freedom. At the center of this biopic is a young adolescent girl by the name of Minty who is adamant about getting herself and her family free from the bonds of slavery.

Earlier in her life, young Minty attempted to run away from her slave master; however, she is caught and beaten. Shortly after and while still recovering, Minty was asked to go to the local store and while there, she was accused of stealing. Due to the accusation, the store owner hit Minty in the center of her forehead with a loaded gun. Throughout the movie, Minty bore the scar from the assault in the middle of her forehead. Although the scar was an embarrassing reminder of how she was violated, the assault itself caused Minty to start having episodes where she would fall into a trance.

While dazed in her trances, Minty started receiving revelations from a voice and as she continued to grow into womanhood. She identified the voice as being God's voice. Minty was able to confirm that it was God's voice based on the voice providing her with

accurate foresight about what was to come and what she should do in order to avoid trouble for her family.

One day while in a trance, Minty received a revelation about her master attempting to sell her to another slave owner in the South; therefore, Minty knew she had to run away or be bound for the rest of her life. It was that day that a young Minty decided that she would rather be dead than to be enslaved forever. In addition, her deciding to run away at the prompting of the voice of God gave birth to her destiny of becoming one of the greatest abolitionist of all time.

After getting free and remaining free, young Minty became known as Harriet Tubman. As Harriet Tubman, she continued to submit to the voice of God and rely heavily on it as she moved hundreds of slaves to freedom. In addition, because of her expertise and knowledge on the Underground Railroad, which was a route that was used to free slaves, Tubman was recruited by the Union Army as a spy to aid them in knowing the whereabouts of the Confederate soldiers.

What a brave, courageous and woman of faith Harriet Tubman was! It is in my opinion that without her discernment of whose voice she was hearing, her lifelong decision to trust God's voice and her ability to fully obey God's voice during challenging times, Tubman would not have been a successful abolitionist. At one point, Tubman returned to the plantation that she escaped from after having a dream about her husband that she left behind. Upon arriving, she was informed by her husband that he was now married to another woman and was having a child with her. Tubman became very upset at the news and even questioned God about why God allowed her to have the dream concerning her husband.

It was at that point during the movie that I noted that God never spoke to Tubman but rather, she simply had a dream about who she was missing. Instead of her making a blank trip back to her past, Tubman fell into one of her trances and God spoke to her concerning her siblings who were about to be sold down South the next day. How amazing is it that God will still speak to and give us purpose when we are where he has not sent us?

Oftentimes, we wonder why and how one has become successful or able to do the unthinkable in ministry and most attribute how far they have gone to their ability to listen to God's voice as a guide. At the start of compiling this document, I gave much thought to which biblical characters would be great examples of the rewards of listening to God's voice and the consequences of not listening to God's voice.

The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of how God's voice can lead one into becoming an anointed and valuable vessel. With no prior relationship with the Holy Spirit or God, the Apostle Paul gave ear to the voice of God and because of his willingness to obey the voice of God, his sight was restored. On the other hand, King Saul was given specific instructions concerning the Amalekites and he chose to trust the voice of God but not fully obey it. King Saul's poor decision cost him his kingship and the favor of God resting on him for his remaining days on earth.

As born-again believers, we are taught to heavily rely on the scriptures when it comes to our life experiences; however, there are other notable people and the area of science that can provide us with in-depth insight about the existence of spiritual and super natural power of the voice of God. One notable person who is not found in the scriptures is Julian of Norwich and she is notable because of her super-natural experience she

encountered while on her sick bed. When considering the vastly moving field of science, there are specific disciplines that have the task of studying the human mind, behavior and how it responds to internal stimuli. In this thesis, I will explore how psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists play an intricate role in helping individuals identify when they are hearing voices and who may be responsible for the voices.

Being able to discern, trust, and fully obey the voice of God will lead to a life full of faith and favor for born-again believers. A common problem that I have analyzed in my personal life and the life of other believers is not knowing if they are making the right decisions or not. Based on my personal experiences, I have developed a pattern of being faced with a problem, praying about the problem, and then guessing about which direction I should take.

If God is the Creator of all things and God sees and knows all, why do Christians not simply ask Him what is the right decision and just obey what He says? To answer this question, I took into account why I have struggled with the above-mentioned tasks. For years, I have struggled with knowing when God is speaking, the devil is speaking, or when I am speaking to myself. After going through several encounters that pushed me to fast, pray, and be still, I learned the voice patterns of God.

This discovery is not to say that I will never get ahead of God by listening to my own voice; however, I can say that I have learned that God's voice is like a whisper that only suggests and not demands. The question that I am hypothesizing is, can Christians live error free lives if they learn how to discern, trust, and obey the voice of God?

I am proposing that Christians can live lives that are error free if they learn how to follow the three-fold method of knowing when God is speaking (discern), having the

faith that God will not fail them (trust) and wanting more of God over selfish desires (obey).

During this project process, I wanted to provide methodologies for learning, trusting, and obeying the voice of God through six weeks of one-hour teachings. These one-hour teachings consisted of biblical, scholarly, researched, and personal experiences. At the beginning of this six-week process, the specific content areas that would be covered and the reasoning behind each were presented.

Biblical Perspective

In exploring the importance of discerning, trusting, and fully obeying the voice of God from a biblical perspective, the lives of King Saul and the Apostle Paul were surveyed. Both were chosen vessels assigned to carry out the will of God. In addition, both showed the ability to discern and trust the voice of God; however, King Saul did not obey the voice of God. The biblical encounters found in 1 Samuel 15:13-16, 22-25 and Acts 9:4-15 serve as evidence that God has specifically created us for His purpose, but we must be willing to grow closer to him each day. Our God ordained purposes can be revealed during the quiet intimate moments that we spend with Him.

As stated previously, God will ask us to do things that may not make sense to us; however, God expects us to hearken to God's voice and carry out what He has asked of us. Next, when God speaks to us, He will also inform someone within our reach about His plans for us; therefore, we will be able to hear confirmation from someone other than God. Thirdly, God will elevate or give us things that we are not ready for so we can learn about our strengths and weaknesses. In addition, God allows us to be in positions and

situations that will cause us to spend more time talking to Him in prayer. Lastly, God will extend His grace and mercy; however, God will not allow us to remain in leadership roles for His people when our hearts are full of selfishness.

Historical Perspective

From a historical perspective, the life and revelations of Julian of Norwich were thoroughly examined. Looking at the life and spiritual encounters of a woman who was bold enough to write about what God shared with her while on her sick bed can be encouraging to anyone who feels ignorant about the voice of God. In addition, Julian's encounter is an example of how God is willing to go to great lengths to show us who He really is and what God has for us to do. Julian did not allow her gender as woman stop her from telling of God's sanctioned and sacred moments during the fourteenth century. Although it took her twenty years to inform the world of her unique encounter with God, Julian was careful to include every aspect of God, how God spoke to her, and the importance of the Trinity when referencing the voice of God.

Julian's revelations about the sufferings of Christ, herself, and the voice of God, clearly demonstrated that spiritual encounters with the God of our faith. Everyone will not experience God in the same manner; however, we should have a divine encounter that leaves us saying, without a doubt, that the God of our faith is real. The experience that we become our personal testimonies that we often reflect on so that we are reminded of what God has individually shown us. In addition, we should recall our divine experiences when we are unsure of a strange process that God is asking us to fully trust and obey.

Theological Perspective

When considering the voice of God from a theological perspective, I was inclined to take an in depth look at Christian education and ethics from the practical theological lens, science and religion and Process Theology from the systematic approach. Every believer must be ethical and intentional about gaining formal and informal educational opportunities about the voice of God. Although churches should almost be required to have Christian education opportunities, believers must be intentional and have a high standard of integrity about cultivating their relationship with God. A deepen relationship with God requires learning how to discern his voice from yours and the devil. Mistakes will be made in the life of every believer; however, bad habits can be avoided with guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Wayne A. Grudem's book, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, references systematic theology as being any study that provides an answer on what the whole Bible teaches us today on any given topic.¹ Systematic theology is a part of theoretical theology and is one of the three disciplines in this area, biblical and historical are the other two. Systematic theology is very broad in the sense that it allows for more detailed thought processes during the discussions around specific Christian doctrines.

Next, modern day believers should have a certain degree of understanding how science plays a part of human anatomy. The Bible is true in identifying God as the Creator of all things; however, it does not speak to how mankind ought to medically care for the body. With information such as medical guidelines missing from the Bible,

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 1.

Christians should be receptive to the many people that God has gifted with knowledge about the human body. In addition, according to Jerry Coyne, science is a set of tools refined over hundreds of years for getting answers about nature and can be considered a method for understanding how the universe works. Science is an evolving field that does not permit stagnation or contentment; therefore, it demands research and further consideration of things that have already been established.² Religion should also be as such.

Lastly, sound Christian theology should consider the true identity of Process Theology. Although Process Theology can be confusing and not well received, Christians should take time to examine its offerings. Process Theology pushes and stretches believers to know God as one who is relational and not just authoritative. Since God is relational, believers are given the chance to choose or reject everything that God has to offer, including His voice as guidance.

Theoretical Perspective

The field of mental health in conjunction with the professions of counseling and social work are all instrumental in the lives of Christians who desire to spiritually grow into discerning the voice of God. In our modern-day society, we see more and more people who are suffering from mental illnesses that are either untreated or undiagnosed. In addition, because people are not clinically equipped to deal with the issue of the mind, they are more likely to turn to unhealthy use of chemicals and substances. Just as born-

² Jerry A. Coyne, *Faith versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 28.

again believers are ethically responsible for caring for the spiritual growth, they are equally responsible for their mental health.

Julian of Norwich's mental capacity can be given further thought as she found herself in the bed sick for a period of time. Depression can be considered here, and schizophrenia could be talked about; however, Julian was still able to attribute her revelations to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Although some Christians struggle with accepting mental health related diagnoses, the sad reality is, they are real, and many believers are suffering with them.

Within the African American community, the idea of counseling is shunned and frowned upon. The African American community has a history of having strong religious beliefs and convictions; however, it is this community that suffers in silence and is less likely to receive counseling to address certain mental health issues. Embracing the idea of science is also a challenge for the African American community of faith. When we analyze the field of counseling and its correlation to one being able to discern the voice of God, counselors are noted for the influence and guidance that they offer to patients. Just as social workers seek to empower people by allowing them to choose decisions that they feel are best for their lives, counselors also take the same approach when advising.

Lastly, when people begin to deal with psychosis and other mental illness such as chronic delusions, they tend to hear voices and may become obsessed with religious ideas. Unhealthy or irrational delusions can cause one to question the validity of the voice of God. As previously mentioned, Christian believers have an ethical obligation to educate themselves on how God speaks and moves.

Methodology

The selected approach for executing this project was weekly Bible study groups that were held at Monumental Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. The method of Bible Study groups was selected for three reasons:

1. The weekly Wednesday night Bible study was the most convenient time for the congregants to come together outside of Sunday morning worship.
2. Conducting a Bible study created a more intimate atmosphere with the subject that was being discussed and it demonstrated how the congregants could get closer to God through the specific topics.
3. Having a small informal setting provided opportunities to have transparency and feedback from the congregants.

In order to access the initial spiritual and mental baseline of what the congregants knew at the start of this project, I formulated twenty questions. These twenty questions were used for a pre- and post-test and it was administered at the first and last night of the sessions. These questions were given in a scale manner because I wanted to determine if the congregants thought about the voice of God would change. The pre- and post-test questions are included in Appendix A.

In addition to using a pre- and post-test questionnaire, I also used a demographic survey to capture personal data on the congregants. I felt that personal data may be able to shed some light on why one may be more likely to spend time with God and why some may not do so. Some questions that came to mind before formulating these questions were:

1. Is one more likely to have faith in God when they have fewer resources?
2. What impact does education have on one being able to understand the Word of God?
3. Is there a specific age group that is more likely to discern the voice of God?

4. How much of an impact does Bible study have on one's understanding of the voice of God?
5. Is there a difference across gender concerning one's relationship and ability to hear from God?

These demographic questions were answered during the first session and they were as follows:

Table 1. Demographic survey

Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female
Age Range	<input type="checkbox"/> 18-25 <input type="checkbox"/> 26-40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41-65 <input type="checkbox"/> 66+
Education Level	<input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Some College <input type="checkbox"/> Associate <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor <input type="checkbox"/> Master's <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate
Number of Years Attending Church	<input type="checkbox"/> Entire Life <input type="checkbox"/> 0-5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6-15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16+
Bible Study Attendance	<input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> Regular <input type="checkbox"/> None
Income Range	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-20K <input type="checkbox"/> 21K-40K <input type="checkbox"/> 41K-65K <input type="checkbox"/> 66K+

The three questionnaires were blindly given, and identity of each participant was anonymous. The congregants were assigned numbers ranging from 1200-1240 and they were tasked with remembering their assigned numbers. At the beginning of each session, the congregants signed in and weekly attendance was documented. During the first session, forty participants were present; however, the number in attendance varied weekly and the average number of congregants present each week was thirty-seven.

Implementation

Session One

Upon arrival, the congregants were asked to sign in using their first and last names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers. The first session engaged the congregants in a pre-test, a detailed overview of what to expect in the coming weeks, the purpose of the project, and what they should be able to learn at the end. At the beginning of this and each session, devotion was held, and it consisted of a song of worship, scripture, and a prayer. Devotion was completed by a congregant each week. In addition, the congregants were asked to write down any questions that may come to mind; therefore, a parking lot board was presented and asked to be used in order to preserve as much time as possible for the lesson.

Next, the congregants were informed about my project proposal hypothesis, theme, timeline of dates and which topics would be covered on specific dates. A request was made for the beginning congregants to be as consistent as possible as this would aid in having accurate and significant data at the end of these sessions. In addition, a generalized overview of the foundation chapters were given, and the congregants were advised to take notes as they deemed appropriate. The congregants were then made aware that the knowledge that they gained from the next session, biblical foundations, would provide them with more insight about the questions from the pre-test.

After these expectations were given, the remaining time was spent discussing my personal testimony and synergy document. A detailed account of why and how I resolved to explore the voice of God was emphasized. With this transparency from the synergy

document and a current personal testimony that was provided, about four congregants wanted to come forth and present their recent encounters about how they were able to discern and trust the voice of God.

As the end of this session neared, each question was posted on the reserved parking lot whiteboard was answered and discussed. For questions that I did not have an answer for, they were written down and I informed the participants that I would research for an answer throughout the week. Lastly, I informed the participants about what we would be discussing during the next session of the series and we ended with prayer in a circle.

Session Two

This session began with the congregants signing in and devotion being facilitated by a congregant that volunteered. Before we began to explore that content for the night, I provided a review of the information that was presented during the first session. During this session, both biblical characters and passages were explored, including: King Saul (1 Samuel 15:13-16, 22-25) and the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:4-15). The congregants were provided with a copy of the completed biblical foundations chapter and the congregants were informed about the structured outline and expectations of an exegeted text.

Next, a brief summary of each exegeted section of the chapter was presented, and the congregants were able to learn about detailed background information pertaining to the life of both characters. Most of the time was spent making comparisons between King Saul and the Apostle Paul and how they responded to the voice of God. It was noted that King Saul's instructions came through the prophet of God and the Apostle Paul's

instructions came directly from the Holy Spirit; therefore, an activity was formulated that allowed the congregants to be blind folded to determine if and how well they knew each other's voices.

Although in the previous session a parking lot board was utilized, questions were taken and answered as they came up. This decision was made because some of the older congregants had issues writing in a fast manner. As they came near a close, an overview of the content that would be covered during the next session was given and the congregants were presented with journals that were created. In these journals, they were asked to record their time and dates spent in prayer and reading the Bible. In addition, they were asked to specifically document when and if they felt that God was speaking to them.

Session Three

Of the sessions thus far, this was the fiery one! This session began with devotion being conducted by one of the congregants after everyone signed in. At the beginning of the session, a review of the content from the previous week was held and a general review of the content was given. A summarized handout on from the historical foundation chapter was distributed and the congregants were asked to start reflecting on a personal testimony that they would like to share at the end of the session.

After discussing the life and mystical encounters of Julian of Norwich, I shared my personal testimony of encountering the Holy Spirit when I was nineteen years old. The congregants were then asked to share their spiritual encounters with the group, and some became consumed with by the Holy Spirit as they reflected on what drew them to

Christ. Some cried, others shouted “hallelujah,” and several begin to dance. By this point, our session turned into a celebration and worship encounter with the Holy Spirit for its continuous hand of protection and blessings that He has brought into all our lives.

As we began to calm the atmosphere, we shifted by singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” The congregants were then informed about the content focus for the upcoming week, which was, prayer and fasting. A handout on fasting was provided and the congregants were asked to thoroughly read over the information and come prepared during session four to ask questions and give any feedback that they may have based on the information that was given. We then ended the session with a group prayer.

Session Four

Session four began just as the previous session began, that is, with the congregants signing in and devotion being conducted by one of the congregants. Next, I reviewed the handout on fasting and informed that the information was obtained from a previous corporate fast that I participated in. This information provided guidance about what could be eaten, what scriptures we would read daily, and a brief description about what could physically happen to the body. In addition, the congregants were advised to consult with their healthcare professional before starting the fast if they were taking medications or were not in the best health.

Next, examples of fasting in the scriptures were expounded upon and the congregants engaged in feedback about some of their previous fasting experiences. As I expounded on how fasting can help us remove daily distractions that prevent us from hearing the voice of God, the congregants were each given a blank prayer and devotional

journal. This blank journal was provided as tool to assist the congregants in being able to track if they heard God's voice speaking to them during their daily devotional time while they were on a corporate fast. Although the prayer and devotional journal was designed for the congregants to write down their experiences, I provided them with specific scripture and two statements to expound on daily. These scriptures and two statements are included in Appendix B.

The congregants were then encouraged to spend at least twenty-minutes in devotion and prayer with the Lord daily. A specific time of the day was not set aside for the devotion and prayer time because of the various schedules of the congregants. As this session moved along, the contents shifted from fasting to the topics of systematic and practical theology. The congregants were made knowledgeable about the differences between practical and systematic theologies. In addition, I informed them about how and why I decided to closely associate Christian education and ethics (practical approach), science and religion and Process Theology (systematic approach) with one being able to hear the voice of God.

As the session was ending, the congregants were informed about the next session's topic, which was the theoretical perspective (interdisciplinary) section of this document and individually sharing their fasting and journaling experiences with the group. In addition, the congregants were made aware of the establishment of a call-in prayer line that would be setup for the upcoming week. As previously mentioned, the congregants all had various busy schedules, therefore, they would have the option to call-in to the prayer line and hear a playback of the prayer for that day. This prayer line was

only setup to occur for five consecutive days; however, it was extended for a total of fourteen days. A group prayer was held, and the session ended.

Session Five

Everyone was participating in the corporate fast during the previous week; therefore, dinner was prepared for this session. As the congregants arrived, they were asked to sign-in and start eating. After thirty minutes of eating and fellowshiping, I started the session by conducting devotion which included scripture and prayer. Before covering the designated content for the session, I allowed four volunteers to come before the group and speak on the recordings in their prayer journals and their experiences with fasting. One congregant provide full details on how it was her very first time partaking in a corporate or individual fast in the twenty-five years that she has been in church. She also went on to inform that she fully participated in the fast by adhering to the suggested food list and incorporating prayer and reading the Word of God daily.

Another congregant indicated that he was challenged by unforeseen turmoil in his home, being laid off from his job, and feeling hopeless up until the last day of the fast. When the congregants were finished sharing their experiences, I shared with the group the challenges of my week; however, I was able to hear from God concerning some things that needed to be addressed. Next, I gave a brief review of all the information that was covered in sessions one through four and informed that we only had one more session left; therefore, it was imperative that everyone was in attendance to take the post-test during the next session.

This session's content was opened by giving an overview of my career and how I chose the field of social work as a profession. Secondly, a detailed description of the theoretical section was given, and the congregants were informed about how I concluded which occupation closely related to the theme of this document. Although the three disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, and social work were heavily discussed, a great deal of time was spent informing the participants about the significant impact the church could have on mental health awareness.

As the session was coming to an end, some congregants gave feedback on the information that was discussed, and others asked questions about it. In addition, one congregant suggested that the church conduct mental health workshops or clinics so the community and other congregants could learn more about preventing or dealing with mental health issues. The congregants were thanked for their thoughtful input and the session was ended.

Session Six

As the congregants arrived for this session, they were again asked to sign-in and to take a copy of the post-test to their seats. A scripture and prayer were offered by two of the congregants. Everyone was asked to hold off on completing the post-test until after the brief review of the previous five sessions were given. After the review, the congregants were asked to complete the post-test based on the information that was present and any previous knowledge they had on the questions being posed. After each participant completed the post-test, they were collected and turned in to me.

Upon receiving all the post-tests, I informed the congregants that we would now review the questions that were on the tests and they were encouraged to answer, ask questions and provide feedback concerning the tests. This session then turned into dialogue about the voice of God and the importance of being a born again believers to know God's voice. In addition, it was determined based on the questions that there is no designated right or wrong way for a believer to hear the voice of God, it is God who determines how He will speak to each of us. As this session was ending, the congregants were asked to blindly complete an evaluation on the overall sessions that were held. Information concerning the completion of this project was given and gratitude was expressed by me.

Summary of Learning

At the beginning of this project, I hypothesized that if the congregants at Monumental Baptist Church would be able to discern, trust, and fully obey the voice of God that they would be able to live an error-free life. As this project was being conducted, a few things came to my realization. To begin, the ways in which we learn how to discern the voice of God can and will be different for us all. In fact, being able to discern the voice of God may never come about for some believers; however, that is not to say that obedience of God's voice is not possible.

Secondly, it can be noted that some have been in church their entire life and still struggle with doing what they hear the voice of God clearly instructing them to do. Just because one struggles with acting on what God has instructed them to do does not necessarily mean that one does not trust God, sometimes, our humanity can overtake our

spiritual strength when we have not taken steps to ensure that our spirituality remains strong.

Initially, ten questions were created and then some of these questions were randomly selected, reworded, and asked again; therefore, there were a total of sixteen questions on the pre and post-test. Although there were some slight changes with the responses on the pre and post-tests, a significant difference could only be detected in questions two, five, twelve and fourteen. In addition, those who attend Bible study sometimes, have been in church their entire life, are between the ages of forty-one through sixty-five years old and have completed at least a bachelor's degree. The data indicates that they agree more about knowing when God is speaking to them.

In no way does the data indicate that one is more likely to know the voice of God based age group, economic status, education level, or how long one has been in church. Lastly, 70% of the group was female and the other 30% male; therefore, I do not feel that the sample size ratio allowed for an accurate determination of which gender was or is more likely to know the voice of God.

The pre- and post-test findings were as follows:

Table 2. Pre-test results

Pre-Test	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 1	0	5	2	28	5
Question 2	19	15	5	1	0
Question 3	10	26	0	2	2
Question 4	0	0	0	9	31
Question 5	20	11	2	3	4
Question 6	5	26	4	5	0
Question 7	4	10	0	19	7
Question 8	2	4	2	2	30
Question 9	0	1	2	8	29
Question 10	0	26	1	5	8
Question 11	3	8	6	15	8
Question 12	0	0	0	8	32
Question 13	0	2	2	7	29
Question 14	14	16	5	0	5
Question 15	15	17	2	3	3
Question 16	4	6	1	16	13

Table 3. Post-test results

Post-Test	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question 1	0	8	0	30	2
Question 2	24	16	0	0	0
Question 3	28	11	0	0	1
Question 4	0	0	0	4	36
Question 5	36	0	0	0	4
Question 6	29	6	5	0	0
Question 7	17	5	0	8	10
Question 8	2	4	2	5	27
Question 9	19	7	0	4	10
Question 10	18	17	0	0	5
Question 11	1	3	1	11	24
Question 12	0	0	0	0	40
Question 13	0	0	0	1	39
Question 14	35	5	0	0	0
Question 15	2	8	2	7	21
Question 16	2	8	0	11	19

Demographic survey results are as follows:

Figure 1. Demographic survey results – gender

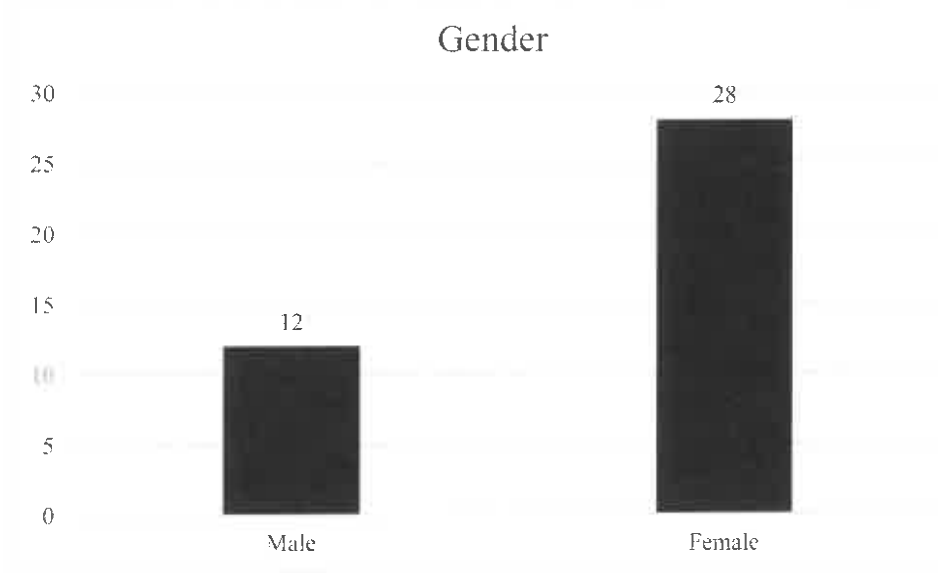


Figure 2. Demographic survey results – age range

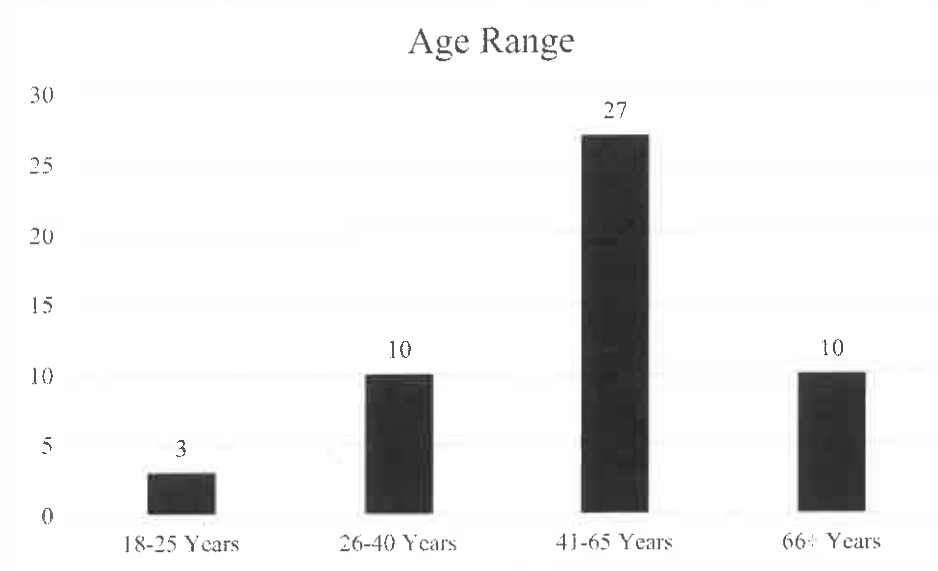


Figure 3. Demographic survey results – education level

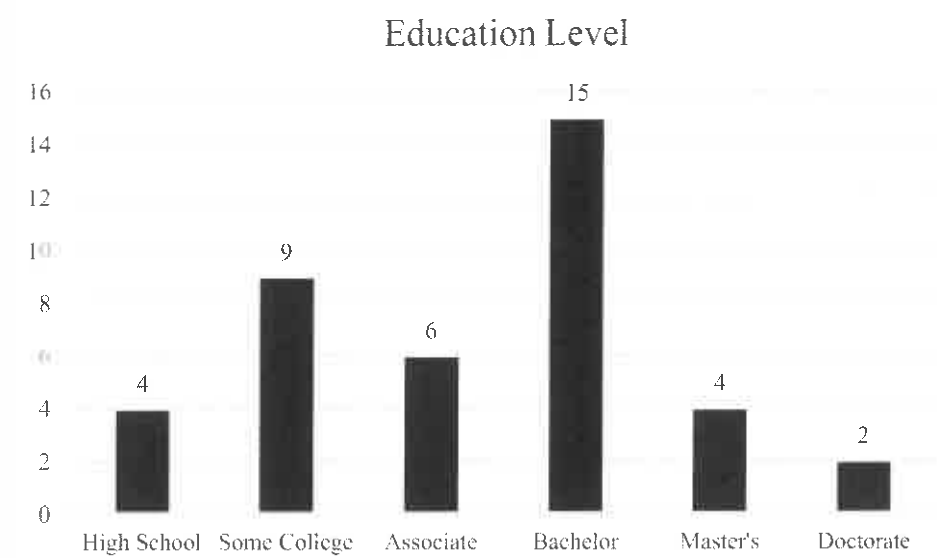


Figure 4. Demographic survey results – number of years attending church

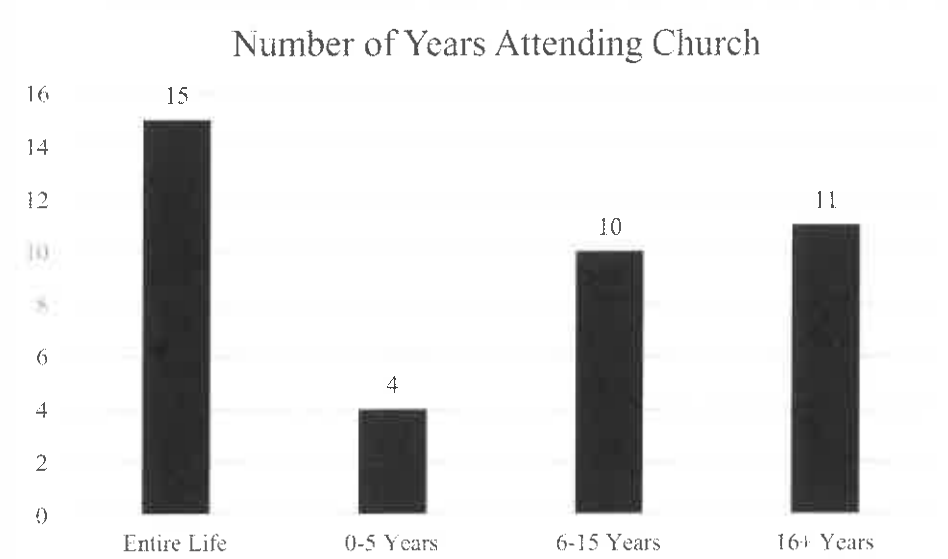


Figure 5. Demographic survey results – Bible study attendance

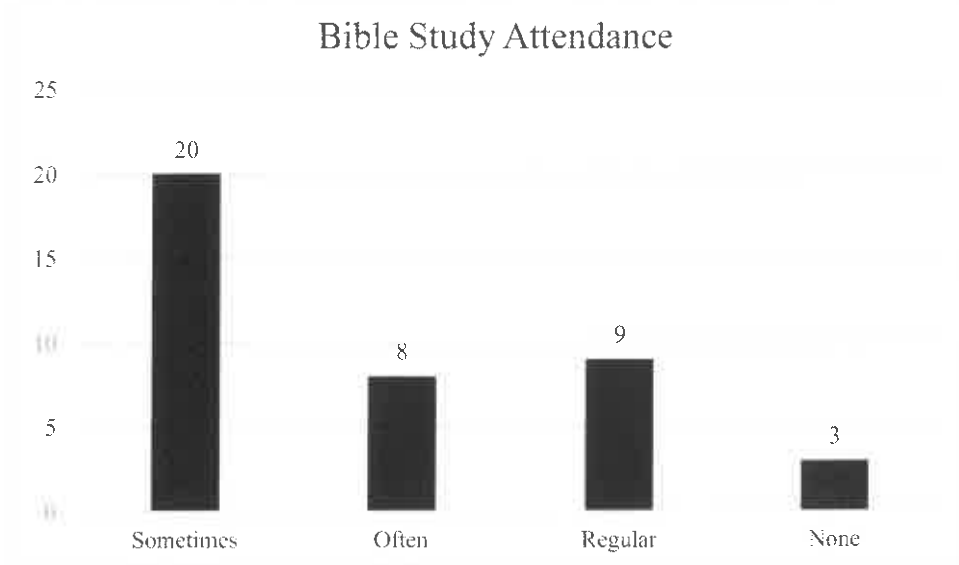
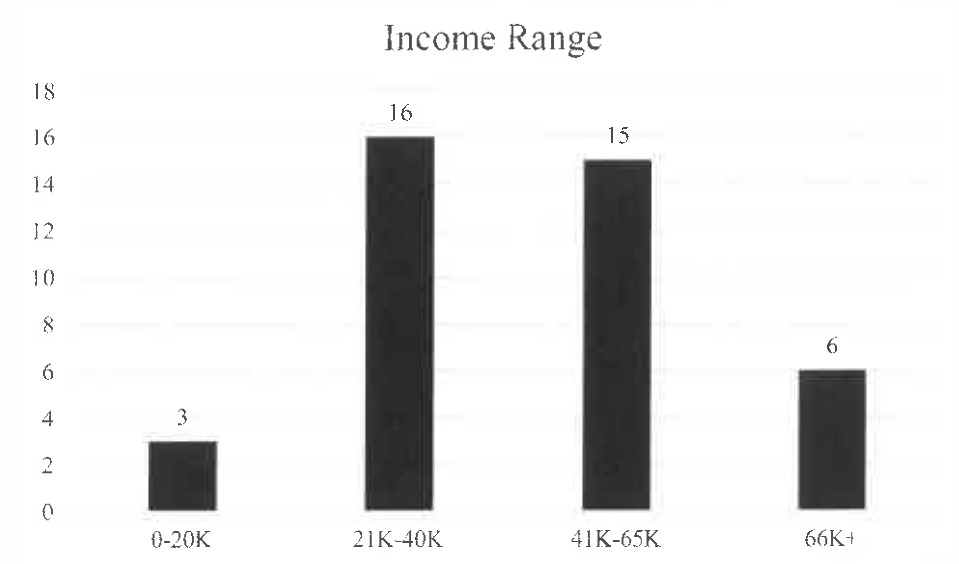


Figure 6. Demographic survey results – income range



Conclusion

In concluding this work, I have learned that God's voice is not limited to our inability to discern, trust, or obey God's voice. In addition, God's voice is not limited to the volume of our ears. As born-again believers, we all have access to the Holy Spirit and its unwavering guidance. This project has taught me that some of us will know God's

voice early in our Christian journey while others may not be able to identify God's voice until later in their journey; however, I can conclude that God speaks to us all. In the future, I would like to continue offering teachable sessions such as the ones that were held during this project. Although this project did not yield the outcome of believers living error-free lives, I do feel that ongoing teaching concerning the voice of God will allow believers to increase their spiritual ability to hear.

We must be intentional about learning whose voice is speaking to us and when. We must also be able to identify the things that prevent us from hearing from God and eradicate those things from our lives. First, a thing that keeps us from hearing God's voice is our inability to forgive others from offense and ourselves from mistakes. When we choose not to forgive, we begin to fill ourselves with resentment and ill-fated feelings that prevent us from freely worshipping and communing with God. It is through God's word, time spent in prayer, having an empty heart that needs to be filled that God can speak to and through us. Unforgiveness can also lead us to malice and hatred towards others and ourselves. The love of Christ can never abound where there is malice, strife, or hatred because Christ came to conquer the evil things of this world. When one chooses these things of this world over the love of Christ, it is then that Christ is ultimately rejected.

Secondly, we must incorporate God into our daily lives. This incorporation of God can come in the form of meditating, reading His word, worshipping or simply saying, thank you. As proclaimers of the Gospel, we must make time for the one who has created time. Spending time with God allows us to get closer to God and enhances our spiritual ability to hear those things that come from the spiritual realm. How we

incorporate God in our daily lives is a personal decision that should be made early on in our Christian walk and should not be limited to corporate worship times. Jesus Christ's life was an example for all to follow. He was a master at being with the masses but broke away often to commune with God.

Lastly, we should reflect and reflect often on what God has done in our lives. This reflecting can assist us in being able to trace how and when God spoke to us during our challenging seasons in life. Sometimes, we can miss when God is speaking to us while going through difficult situations because we tend to get busy trying to figure out how we will solve the problem. What a blessed assurance we have in placing all our trust in God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX A
PRE- AND POST-TEST QUESTIONS

I can clearly identify the voice of God

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
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God can only speak to those who are Saved

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

The only sign of a mature Christian is one who can obey God's voice the first time

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Fasting is one way to clearly hear from God without distractions from the flesh

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

God only speaks through the Holy Scriptures, prophets, or preachers

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

I am not capable of learning what God's voice sounds like

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

God's tone of voice is demanding because He cares and gets frustrated with us

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Knowing God's voice, the first time is a sure sign of maturity.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

A spiritual fast is about taking a break away from people, places, things and food.

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

God only spoke directly to prophets in the Old Testament

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Fasting can lead to isolation from the normal routines of life

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

Throughout the Bible, God spoke to people as He saw fit

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

The more we mature spiritually, the more likely we will initially discern God's voice

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

I may never learn what the voice of God sounds like

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

I know the difference between God's voice and other voices

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

God's Voice tone can change when he wants to get a serious point across to us

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
------------------------	---------------	--------------	------------	---------------------

APPENDIX B

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR DAILY JOURNALING

Thursday

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 3:15

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

Friday

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 4:12

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

Saturday

Scripture Reading: Galatians 5:16

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

Sunday

Scripture Reading: Romans 12:1-2

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

Monday

Scripture Reading: Revelations 3:20

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

Tuesday

Scripture Reading: Psalms 85:8

Daily Journaling:

What I want God to know: _____

What is God saying to me: _____

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